

Usthi Foundation – 50 Years Creating Opportunities for Young People in India and Nepal



1976-2026

Usthi Today

Kolkata, India: what would eventually become the Usthi Foundation began here in 1976. Much has happened since then. The Foundation's involvement has expanded to other regions of India and to Nepal and dozens of projects have been implemented.

Usthi's mission has remained unchanged: to provide children and young adults, affected by poverty and exclusion from society, with the foundation for a self-determined and dignified life and to offer them better prospects for the future. This mission is more relevant today than ever. The gap between rich and poor continues to widen and children and women, in particular, still belong to the most vulnerable groups whose voices carry insufficient weight.

Usthi's work is based on a holistic approach with three areas of focus – education, health and protection & empowerment. The projects enable children to receive a sound school education and offer young adults – especially women – work-related skills training, supporting them as they enter working life. In addition, the projects improve access to healthcare in remote regions and provide places of refuge for children and women affected by violence and abuse. In 2025, the 13 current projects reached around 46,000 people.

An essential factor for Usthi's successful work is its close co-operation with long-standing partner organisations in India and Nepal, as well as the active involvement of local communities. Dialogues on an equal footing, respect for cultural values and the shared objective of making progress together are fundamental principles. The mutual exchange of knowledge and expertise is a continual learning process. Another key aspect of co-operation is promoting the independence of partner organisations. Around 360 local employees of partner organisations implement Usthi projects on a daily basis.

Usthi's office in Zurich, Switzerland, operates efficiently and transparently. A dedicated team of five staff members shares a total workload of 3.1 FTE (full-time equivalent) – a ratio of approximately 1:100 compared with the number of staff in India and Nepal. Strategic leadership is in the hands of an honorary Board of Trustees, who work closely with the Headquarters and actively supports its work. Thanks to a lean structure and extensive work of volunteers, comparatively little funding is used in Switzerland for project support, communication, fundraising and administration. Around 81% of all donations directly benefit people in India and Nepal. This is well above the average of Swiss aid organisations audited by the Zewo Foundation (the certification body for charitable non-profit organisations).

Focus	Project	Place	Target population and Institutions	Local Employees
Education	Ananda School	Hudarait ¹	240 Children	23
	Penthakata School	Puri ²	357 Children	33
	Thaddeus School	Bhastara ¹	208 Children	21
	Waste Management	Puri ²	Penthakata Village	4
	Back-to-School	Hyderabad ³	250 Children	1
	Tutoring Centres	Hyderabad ³	14 Centres 378 Children	15
	Work-Related Skills Training	Hyderabad ³	18 Courses 1,361 Young Adults	21
	Empowering Children & Families	Dhading ⁴	15 Schools 64 Families 2,294 Children	4
Health	Tribal Health Centre & Health Network	Somagiri ²	27,394 Consultations	69
	Health and Education Project	Somagiri ²	9 Day-care centres 247 Small Children	14
Protection & Empowerment	Children's Homes	Hyderabad ³	4 Shared residential homes 61 Children	13
	Women's Homes	Hyderabad ³	5 Shared residential homes 103 Women	11
	Awareness Campaign	Hyderabad ³	13,020 Persons reached	3

Figures as at 2025.

¹ State of West Bengal ² State of Odisha ³ State of Telangana ⁴ Bagmati Province, Nepal

Foreword

Fifty years ago, the foundation stone for Usthi was laid with a soup kitchen in an alley in Kolkata. At the time, Edeltrud and Kurt Bürki probably did not foresee that this foundation stone would grow into a large and stable building, one that would later have to withstand many storms (tsunamis, earthquakes, COVID-19 pandemic). But are we, living in the protected environment of Switzerland, truly aware that Usthi is in fact almost constantly facing headwinds in its day-to-day work on location? Fragile structures give rise to both major and minor challenges to be overcome day by day. Financing and managing the Foundation from Switzerland is also demanding. Anyone who takes on such challenges needs great perseverance and must be driven by their own personal vision. These were distinguishing qualities of Edeltrud and Kurt Bürki as founders, as well as those who later assumed responsibility on the Board of Trustees and within the Usthi team.

Today, this vision is best expressed by the word empowerment. Providing people on the ground with a framework of conditions, which enable them, through education and work, to build the foundations for a self-determined and dignified life with prospects. This, in turn, is also the most effective way to ensure a healthy life. Only thus, can the cycle of poverty be broken – particularly for girls and women.

Strong roots in Switzerland are essential for this work to be successful. Rapperswil-Jona and the wider Zurich metropolitan area, together with the Canton of St Gallen, form this bedrock. Private individuals, companies and public institutions have created the backing needed to turn a vision into reality. Although India has made economic progress, millions of people in the world's most populous country continue to live in poverty, without real prospects. For this reason, our commitment to Usthi must continue.



Benedikt Würth
Member of the Swiss Council
of States, Rapperswil-Jona

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How it all began

1

Interview with Kurt Bürki, Founder of the Usthi Foundation



Matthias Manz in conversation with Kurt Bürki

Fifty years ago, the couple Edeltrud Bürki-Büchel (1938–1998) and Kurt Bürki (born 1941), living in Rapperswil-Jona, laid the foundations for a growing commitment to development co-operation, with an initial charitable project in Kolkata, India. Since 1985, their work has been known under the heading the Usthi Foundation. Matthias Manz, historian and Member of the Board of Trustees since 2020, spoke with Kurt Bürki about the beginnings of the Usthi movement and about the key values that guide its work.

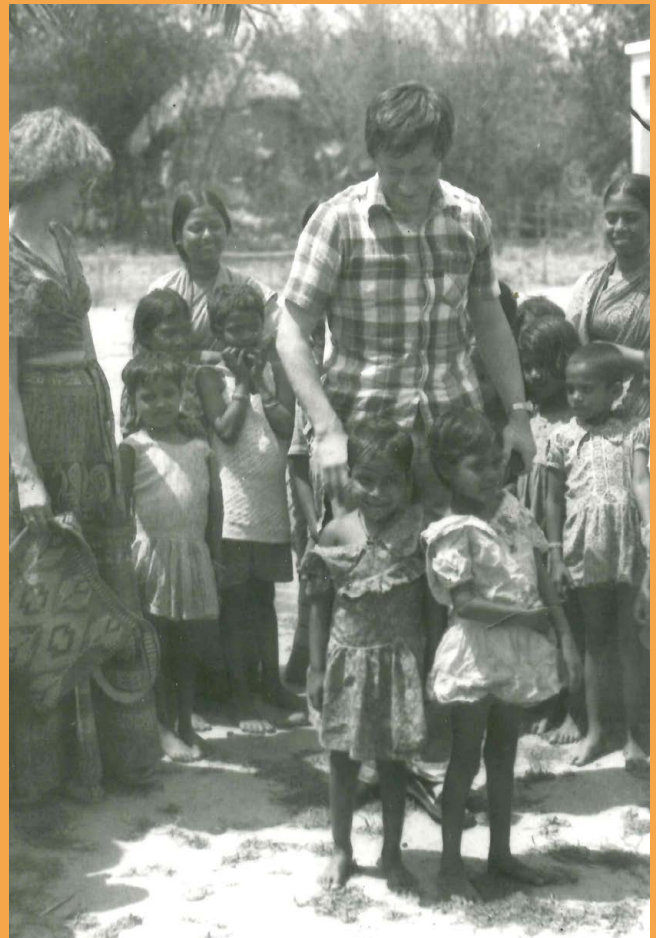
How did a naturopath and a pilot come to establish development co-operation projects?

We live in a very different world today. For my answer to this question to be understandable, I need to take you back to the post war (WWII) years. This may not be easy, but I should like to try to convey the atmosphere of the time which shaped us.

As children, the roar of bombers passed over our heads at night, flown by the US pilots, bringing Germany to its knees. At the age of fifteen, I wanted to see Zurich just once in my life, with its airport as a gateway to the wider world. I grew up in a period politically shaped by what was known as the "Spiritual National Defence" (an exaggeration of Swiss values in contrast to communist dictatorships) which I found uncomfortable. The buzzwords in everyday life were not peace, but the Korean War; the suppression of popular uprisings in East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia by

the Soviet army; the Cold War between the nuclear powers of the USA and the Soviet Union. The construction of the wall across Berlin meant that countless people, attempting to escape dictatorship and to flee to the West, were shot dead in the "Death Strip" (no-man's land). There was the occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and the West Bank by Israel. Social unrest was expressed in protests against the USA-led Vietnam War, against a fossilised establishment in student riots and in favour of equality (Swiss women only gained the federal right to vote on federal matters in 1971).

Europe lay in ruins after the war and provided fertile ground for unbridled technological change, which found a powerful



Edeltrud and Kurt Bürki with children from the Bhor-e-Phool School in Usthi, around 1980

symbolic expression in the moon landing of 1969. My wife and I avidly read publications from the Club of Rome ("Limits to Growth") and followed initial discussions on the overpopulation of our world.

What was your upbringing like?

My wife and I grew up in working-class families with modest financial means. By the early 1970s, we were established as a family, with my position as a Swissair pilot, we were financially independent, owned our own home and had three children. This allowed the conviction to grow in us that we wanted to give society something back from our privileged lives. Somewhat naïvely, we decided to take in two orphaned children. There was enough space in our home and we were filled with the desire to offer affection and to treat the two orphans like our own three children. This was the basis and the environment which made Usthi's creation possible.

What happened in 1976 and the reasons we are now celebrating the 50th anniversary of Usthi?

After an unsuccessful attempt to adopt a child from Colombia, we arrived in India in 1976 with the photograph of a girl whom we were prepared to take into our family.

The megalopolis of Kolkata in eastern India overwhelmed us both. Poverty and misery on the streets were omnipresent. Innumerable children and adults were visibly struggling to survive in the chaos. With each passing day in Kolkata, our guilty conscience grew as to whether two adoptions were, alone, any meaningful contribution to society. Edeltrud and I soon agreed that our financial situation allowed us to invest, in addition to the cost of two adoptions in Switzerland, the same amount each year in improving the fate of street children in Kolkata.

As the exit visa papers for "our" first girl were delayed until September 1976, we immediately began setting up a street kitchen right in the centre of Kolkata for "stray children", homeless children of the metropolis. And thus, Usthi was born!



Street children in Kolkata, 1976

You and your wife Edeltrud, together, built Usthi during its first 20 years. She sadly passed away early, in 1998. What role did Edeltrud play in building and leading Usthi?

My wife and partner was the soul of our family and the stabilising force of the community. She always ensured that decisions and actions were well founded. My recurring professional absences were more than compensated by her prudence, perseverance and dedication.

Usthi was built by both of us – she shaped its content and I its implementation. Two to three times a year, together, we were to be found on site in India and learned from one another. Alongside her dedication and care in building Usthi, her strong leadership skills provided me with the backing I needed for realisation of the projects. Her strength and humanity shaped me and made it possible for me to continue Usthi after her untimely death. Nevertheless, after her passing, it took four years before I believed I could successfully continue Usthi on my own. During those four years, I merely administered Usthi and many things did not function as intended. My wife was missing as my judicious partner and Usthi missed her at every turn.



Edeltrud Bürki with a child in Kolkata, 1976/1977

Terre des Hommes India (TDH-I)

The Bürki couple carried out both adoptions in Kolkata through Terre des Hommes Lausanne (TDH-L). The founder and director of TDH-L, Edmond Kaiser (1914–2000), was an enthusiastic reader of the writer and pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. In 1976, Kaiser founded TDH India together with the man who would later become the local Usthi Project Manager. Since the Bürkis had already worked with him, Kaiser transferred responsibility for TDH-I in 1979 to Edeltrud, as a member of the Board of Trustees and to Kurt, the Swissair pilot, as Chairman of the Board. In 1991, both withdrew from the Board and handed responsibility back to TDH-L.

Over the course of twelve years, the Bürkis and the local Project Manager developed TDH-I from initially three day-care centres into a social enterprise which assumed responsibility for the education of 12,000 children and youngsters, from kindergarten through to work-related training. The Usthi school centre Bhor-e-Phool served as a model. Up to the establishment in 1985 of its own partner organisation in India, the Usthi Foundation India, the Usthi movement, Switzerland channelled any financial transfers via TDH-L.

The first school, Bhor-e-Phool, in the village of Usthi ↗2.1.1, which gave our movement its name, was not only a school, but also included a farm, manual workshops, a sales outlet and a health centre where sick pupils, staff and family members were cared for by a nurse and a visiting doctor. What role models did you have for this far-reaching concept?

We had no role models, since we did not come from a professional development co-operation organisation, had no knowledge of the field and held no professional qualification for it.

The first project was the result of a learning process rather than a predefined design. Our aim, for partner organisations, was to remove their reliance on donations, so that one day we should no longer be needed.

We began by providing children with adequate nutrition and lower-level education, thereby giving them better prospects for the future. We continually sought, over time, to resolve emerging problems – I refer to this as process-driven learning. Our primary objective at the time was to strive to eliminate injustices – for example by admitting only children from economically and socially disadvantaged families to our schools – and to generating self-reliance through value-creation activities within the projects, such as farming. In addition, it was important to us that all schools run by Usthi taught and promoted traditional culture, in order to counteract emerging cultural globalisation. To this day, classical Indian dance and recitation are taught in all Usthi schools as part of a comprehensive education.

What did the first two schools look like in practical terms?

At the first Usthi school, Bhor-e-Phool, we fostered a sense of community in the village of Usthi by creating a community centre. A tea house and a grocery shop, selling eggs from the Usthi chicken farm and vegetables from the Usthi garden, was an invitation to people to stay awhile and chat. At the same time, bicycles could be repaired in the bicycle



Bicycle workshop of the Bhor-e-Phool School in Usthi, around 1985

workshop, chairs re-glued in the carpentry workshop, or shirts ordered from the tailor's. Everyone felt welcome at the Usthi Community Centre.

At the second Usthi school, Ananda in Hudarait ↗2.1.2, we attempted to establish a large farm. We wanted to integrate food production into Ananda School's educational plan, use the products for own-consumption and sell surplus produce on the local market, in order to promote the project's financial self-sufficiency. To avoid dependence on the rainy season for good harvests, we invested in artificial irrigation powered by solar energy, which promised a second harvest without extra maintenance and energy costs. This, too, was a learning process which later evolved into a project.



Classroom of the Bhor-e-Phool School in Usthi, 1993



Solar installation of the Ananda School for irrigating the fields, 1987

Today, the Ananda School is only a school – why did this change occur?

Plans must be adapted to changing circumstances.

The Ananda School in Hudarait is one of the educational centres operated by our Indian partner, the Usthi Foundation India, which we helped establish. During its development, it came to a major turning point.

Due to the persistent and serious health problems of the Usthi India Project Manager, local management lost control over the projects in the villages of Usthi, Hudarait and in Puri 2.1.3. At the same time, the Project Manager prevented all efforts to introduce any well-qualified relief or succession. In 2006, we were forced to withdraw from responsibility for the projects of Usthi India. A transitional solution, limited to five years, mitigated the consequences for those receiving support and for employees. Donated funds were, thereafter, freed up for educational projects and were channelled both into temporary co-operation projects and into new long-term partnerships, many of which still exist today. During the two years without leadership, Usthi India reduced its activities and sold part of its land and buildings. The money disappeared. Within two years, Usthi India was financially ruined by corruption. After the financial collapse, our conditions for new leadership were accepted and co-operation with Usthi India resumed in 2008 under new prerequisites. The organisation subsequently developed into a well managed and reliable partner.

In the Ananda education project, farming was no longer possible after the sale of the paddy-fields. The land which was still available within the school grounds was repurposed and fruit trees were planted for own consumption, as well as expanding existing playgrounds. The large free-standing playground is now rented out on Sundays for weddings and festivities, contributing to financial self-sufficiency. The strategy and educational curricula were adapted accordingly.



Cultivation of a paddy field by the agricultural unit of the Ananda School, 2004

The Usthi movement is based on strong fundamental values. Did these values exist from the outset, or how did you and Edeltrud develop them?

Values emerge from experience and are not consciously developed – certainly not by us. We simply tried to understand what was required and then acted accordingly. Human striving for improvement brings not only success, but also failure and new challenges. An honest analysis of the past should shed light on failures and this is the only way to be prepared for the future.

Of course, I had role models in my childhood. My father told me never to spend more than I had in my wallet. The fact that, even after 50 years, Usthi is extremely well positioned to face future challenges, is due to this type of prudent financial planning. My father gave me the tools for my adult life, e.g. to solve problems rather than just stand on the side-lines, to reflect on failure rather than blame others or circumstances and to communicate candidly and honestly. In this sense, my father – a simple man – was a real role model.

Were there other core values besides financial stability?

From the outset, my wife and I agreed that primary responsibility must always lie with the local partner and the local population. It was and remains our task to support people on the ground, as far as humanly possible, in assuming their own responsibilities. Our responsibility lies in safeguarding the Usthi support until it is no longer needed.

The objectives have always remained the same. Co-operation with local partner organisations should always be structured in such a way, that Usthi ultimately becomes redundant. Top of the of objectives list is the financial independence of those receiving aid and that of the partner organisations. Sustainable, long-term impact can only be achieved through value creation. The path to self-reliance requires local knowledge. From the very beginning of our activities, we were convinced that our partners and those benefitting from support are the true experts, as they have grown up within the Indian context. People are not unintelligent simply because they never attended school. Knowledge is more than arithmetic, reading and writing. It was not we who "allowed" beneficiaries and local partners to participate in the projects; rather, the people on the ground have always held (and still hold) the responsibility for the projects and we are allowed to participate in their work. This reversal of the conventional understanding of participation is fundamental to Usthi. In India, it has earned us respect and fostered trust. Without trust, no co-operation will succeed. Trust, however, does not mean abandoning control and reflection.

Usthi has never had its own staff in India. Usthi operated for the first 30 years in dialogue with a single Indian Project Manager; today there are several partner organisations. How did this co-operation evolve over the 50 years?

In the early years, Usthi was dependent on a single local Project Manager. He was a strong personality, which is why we decided to build a local institution together with him. This Project Manager had grown up in India and had been a senior executive in a large steel construction company before founding his own charitable organisation in Kolkata. It goes without saying that our Western world view did not fully align with that of our Project Manager on the ground. We were united in our objectives, but implementation often gave rise to differing views and discussions. This discourse was necessary for us to understand a subcontinent unfamiliar to us. Nevertheless, we were always able to agree on a mutually acceptable solution. The co-operation, based on trust over so many years with a strong and well-connected Project Manager, was a stroke of good fortune and greatly facilitated the expansion of Usthi's projects.

However, dependence on a single local Project Manager also represented a significant entrepreneurial risk. After 30 years, as already mentioned, a severe crisis occurred when co-operation with the Project Manager was no longer possible. Following the new beginning in 2008, this risk was reduced by working co-operation with several local partner organisations, operating independently of one another, in different fields and each supported by strong leadership.

Usthi is accountable to its donors for the targeted and efficient use of donations. Did the Indian partners even allow you to monitor them?

The bases for the allocation of donations are the values of Usthi already mentioned. Naturally, our Indian partners allow monitoring. This is founded on active mutual trust. Joint reflection and openly conducted audits bring greater operational success and, consequently, increased standing of the Indian partner within local society.

Whether too much money is being spent, or resources used sparingly, can only be assessed by comparing like for like. For this, knowledge and understanding of local conditions are indispensable tools.

Monitoring was never a problem for my wife and me, because our partners knew that mistakes were permissible and that we should help them to correct them. This is the only way trust and control are simultaneously possible. Today, monitoring and controls are more formal and tighter, but trust continues to play a major role.

As mentioned above, Usthi had temporarily to withdraw from supporting its partner organisation Usthi Foundation India between 2006 and 2008. How does one cope with such crises in Development Co-operation?

Coping with crises requires a supportive environment. The conviction and motivation required to overcome crises are linked to identity and a sense of belonging. I have experienced three profound crises in my life. The premature loss of my wife and life partner was the greatest crisis and the greatest challenge for my own future and for that of Usthi. The second crisis was the collapse of Swissair in 2001. As a result, Usthi lost almost 30% of its income, not least because Swissair employees constituted a key donor group. Usthi came to within an inch of being unable to meet its financial commitment to children and young people in India. The third crisis was the grave decision to discontinue support for Usthi India in 2006.

In all these crises, my sense of identity and belonging to our Usthi family in India and Switzerland gave me the strength and motivation to persevere.

A further aspect is the responsibility towards society, which we have taken on as the Usthi family. It was no longer about personal feelings. As an organisation, we bear responsibility for the commitments we have made in India and Nepal. When Usthi faced corporate challenges (in coping with the Swissair collapse and in professionalising the organisation) the extensive network, painstakingly built up over many years, helped me to find solutions to keep Usthi alive. Relationships with political and business circles in Switzerland played a key role in this.

The educational project in Usthi village began with donations from the Bürki couple. Soon friends, acquaintances and the municipalities of Rapperswil and Jona joined as supporters. After 15 years, annual donations amounted to CHF 500,000; today they are around CHF 1 million. How was it possible to activate so many donations over so many years?

In the early years, my wife and I never had an income strategy. We never intended to establish an organisation. Our goal was simply to give something back to society from our privileged lives.

Without foregoing personal comforts, my salary as a Swissair captain allowed us to free up CHF 20,000–30,000 per year for social projects in India. Without any particular effort, we were able to obtain cash donations directly from colleagues in the cockpit and cabin for the recipients of Usthi aid. My status as an airline captain generated a high level of trust in our integrity and in the professional implementation of projects on the ground. All of this took place on a purely private basis. The Canton of St. Gallen exempted us from taxation on the condition that we could present separate accounting for Usthi. Income from family and from our professional and public environment initially made other fundraising unnecessary.

But didn't fundraising become more systematic over time?

Very much so. Over the years, we were invited by associations and institutions to give presentations. It was still considered somewhat exotic to listen to a Swissair captain speak about the unconventional field of development co-operation. With 30 or more presentations per year, our network expanded significantly. Service clubs in particular showed great interest in our dedicated work. This led to long-standing relationships with affluent circles of society.

Private individuals from our circles decided to sponsor certain pupils of the Bhor-e-Phool School over a number of years, which considerably simplified planning. In order to reduce the work involved in individual reporting, these pupil sponsorships were later converted into school sponsorships. In 1985, the Canton of St. Gallen required the Usthi movement to become institutionalised, as the financial scale of our activities had grown substantially. We decided to establish a foundation, as we could create it ourselves. Up to 1998, the Board of Trustees consisted solely of my wife and myself. Decision-making processes were extremely short and implementation highly efficient. I knew all donors personally as they came predominantly from personal relationships and from my professional circle. As the network continued to grow, municipalities, church parishes, companies and foundations began to support Usthi on a regular basis. This enabled Usthi to consolidate and expand its activities in India and Nepal.

The first half of Usthi's history was largely shaped by your wife Edeltrud and yourself. When did professionalisation with external staff begin?

After my wife's death in 1998, our children Gabriela and Patrick as well as two friends joined the Board of Trustees. When I decided in 2002 to continue the day to day running of Usthi on my own, we were in a position to be able to recruit external Trustees to the Board. From the outset, volunteers played an important semi-professional role ²⁴.

As part of Usthi's long-term planning, the Board of Trustees decided in 2006 to initiate my succession with employees. For the first time, Usthi appointed an Executive Director.



Documentation on the social situation of the parents and the children's learning progress for student sponsorships

In 2013, Usthi further developed its digital communication and obtained certification from Zewo (a Swiss foundation that certifies charities for transparency and responsible use of donations), which is renewed every five years. Today, Usthi conducts professional fundraising, thereby replacing the ageing first generation of donors. Usthi has a qualified team at its Headquarters and a supportive, competent Board of Trustees. This positions Usthi very well to meet future challenges.

I feel a sense of pride in five decades of meaningful and successful dedication to children and young people – a commitment for which I was not formally trained, but which I have always pursued with conviction, passion and reason.



Ananda School in Hudarait, around 1990

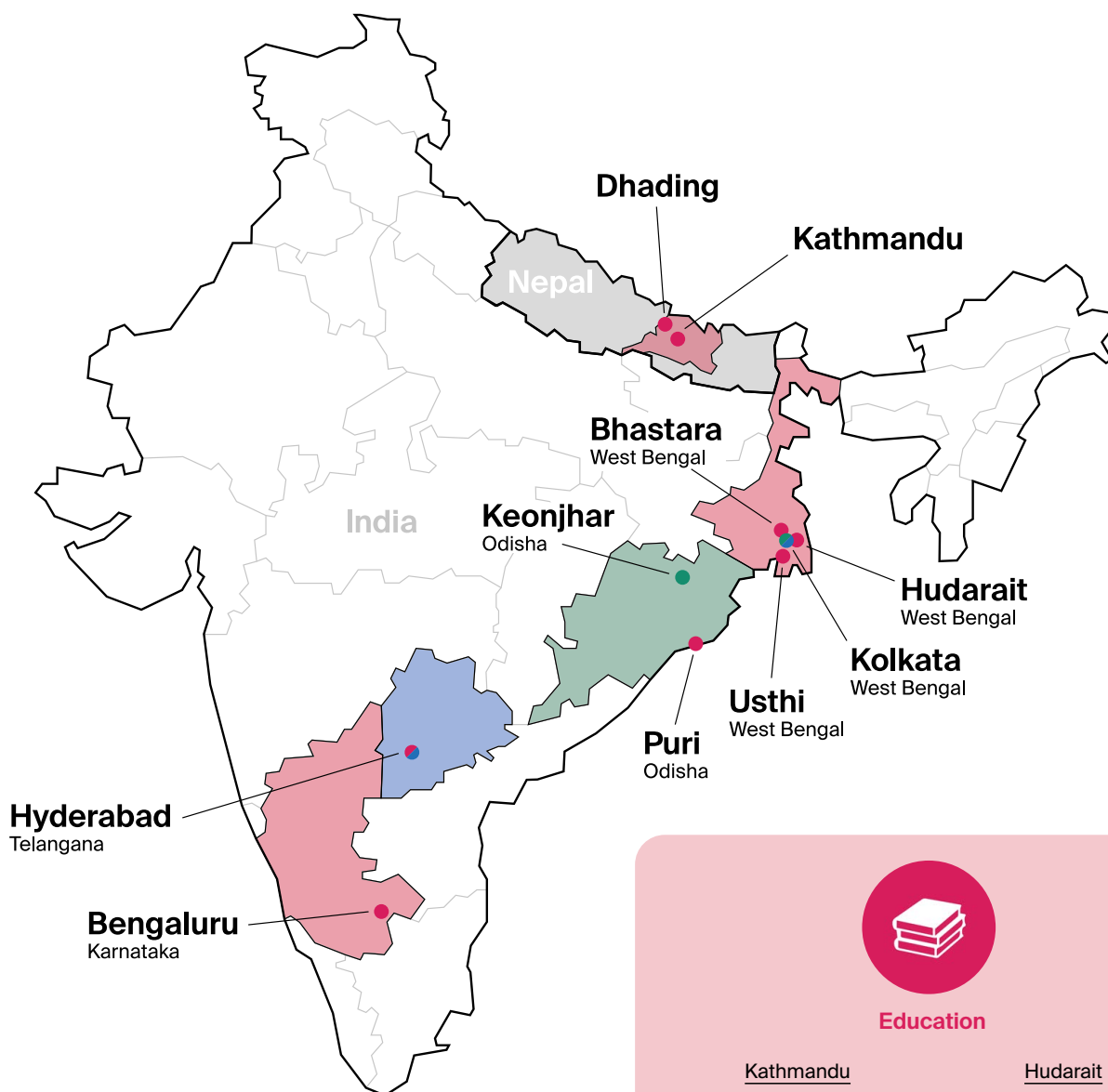
How it all began



Bhor-e-Phool School in Usthi, 1993



Penthakata School near Puri, around 2000



Protection & Empowerment

Kolkata

Bangur Children's Home
1989-2016
2.3.1

Hyderabad

Children's Homes
since 2007
2.3.2

Women's Homes
since 2013
2.3.2

Awareness Campaign
since 2014
2.3.2



Health

Kolkata, Dakshindari

Children Hospital
1996-2006
2.2.2

Infrastructure Development
2001-2004
2.2.2

Keonjhar, Somagiri

Tribal Health Centre and Health Network
1984-2026
2.2.1

Health and Education Project
2012-2026
2.2.1



Education

Kathmandu

Shangri-La
2006-2015
2.1.6

Hudarait

Ananda School
since 1987
2.1.2

Dhading

Empowering Children and Families
since 2019
2.1.8

Bhastara

Thaddeus School
2006-2025
2.1.5

Usthi

Bhor-e-Phool
1977-2005
2.1.1

Hyderabad

Ambboth Tanda School
2006-2008
2.1.6

Puri, Penthakata

Penthakata School
since 1992
2.1.3

Back-to-School
since 2008
2.1.7

Waste Management
2024-2026
2.1.4

Tutoring
since 2009
2.1.7

Bengaluru

Kolar School
2006-2014
2.1.5

Work-Related Skills Training
since 2008
2.1.7

2.1 Education

2.1.1 Usthi Bhor-e-Phool School 1977-2005

In autumn 1976, during two trips with the future Usthi Indian Project Manager through the southern surroundings of Kolkata, Edeltrud and Kurt Bürki decided to establish a school in the village of Usthi. Usthi is located approximately 50 km south of Kolkata. In 1977, it had around 10,000 inhabitants but no school and many residents were illiterate. Numerous children suffered from malnutrition, skin diseases, or tuberculosis. A wealthy family donated land with mud buildings to enable the village to have a school.

At the end of 1977, the school “Bhor-e-Phool” (the morning flower) opened with 80 pupils. Donations helped purchase additional plots and to build further buildings. The school was expanded, a kindergarten established and a health centre for children, staff and villagers set up. A farm with vegetables, cows, chickens and fish farming was set up to supply the school kitchen; any surplus products were sold. Wells providing clean water were constructed in the village.

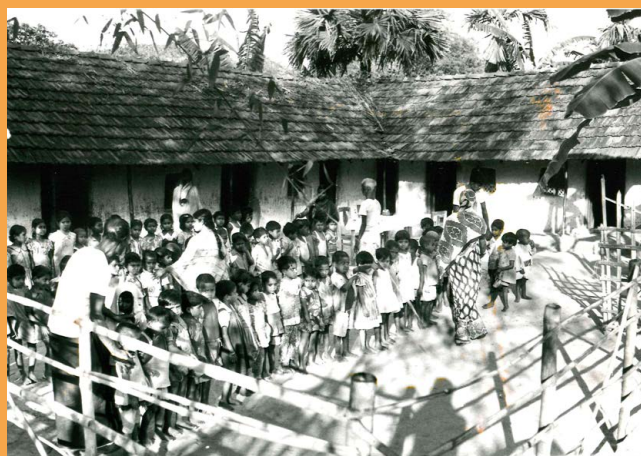
Only children from economically disadvantaged families were admitted to the school. To prevent nepotism, the Indian Project Manager had to create a form for each child detailing the family's personal and economic situation, which was sent to Switzerland. Funding was provided through sponsorships: donors committed to multi-year support. Many children, however, had to leave school prematurely because their parents required them for the harvest or had to move for work.

Within six years of its founding, a large campus had been created. The children's village supported 300 children up to Grade 6 and created 35 jobs. A biogas plant provided energy for the kitchen and the pottery kilns. Usthi became a centre for education, health, agriculture and crafts; a grocery shop and tea house became meeting places. Bhor-e-Phool served

as a model for further Usthi schools around Kolkata 2.1.2 and for Terre des Hommes India (Andharmanik, Sahara Village, Premashis, Sishumala).

At the end of 1985, the Usthi Foundation India (UFI) was established in Kolkata and registered as an organisation with permission to receive foreign donations. Until then, Usthi activities had operated under Terre des Hommes India. Property in the village of Usthi was transferred to UFI by notarised deed.

During the 1980s, India experienced tensions, strikes and uprisings. The school in Usthi was also affected. After periods of calm and development, operations were now severely disrupted by religious conflicts – Bhor-e-Phool was locat-



The first pupils in 1977, before the construction of a new school building



Pupils receiving treatment at the health post, 1993

ed in a religiously mixed area with Hindus and Muslims. In contrast, the Ananda School 2.1.2 is in a predominantly Hindu region and benefits from a more stable social environment. In March 1994, the administrator of Bhor-e-Phool was attacked, leading to the closure of the children's village on 1 April. Seven months later, operations resumed in a reduced form with the kindergarten, school up to Grade 4, basic medical care and smaller-scale farming. The businesses, which had served older pupils for work-related skills training, remained closed. Unused land and buildings were sold to help finance other projects.

In 2006, the Usthi Foundation handed the school over to the family that had donated the land in 1977. Bhor-e-Phool continued for many years but Usthi Foundation lost contact with the school operators.

Despite the conflicts, the children's village in Usthi provided valuable services to children and the village community for over 30 years.

Hudarait Ananda School since 1987

2.1.2

The Usthi Foundation opened its second school in January 1987, 20 km east of central Kolkata, with 100 children from caste-less or low-caste families. All teaching is in Bengali. Here too Usthi built a health centre. Usthi was able to purchase large amount of land and a large farm with rice and vegetable cultivation and a chicken nursery was established, producing food for the Ananda School meals and contribut-



Girls of the Ananda School, around 1987



Newly built public well in the village of Usthi, 1997



Playground of the Ananda School, 2023

ing to the project's financial self-sufficiency through sales of surplus goods. A solar-powered station ensured continuous irrigation, allowing a second harvest each year. These installations were carried out by a Swiss company in co-operation with an Indian steel construction factory.

Owing to high demand, the number of pupils was increased to 150 and in 1995 to 200, covering kindergarten to Grade 8. The Ananda youngsters complete Grade 9 and 10 and sit their final examinations with support from the Usthi Foundation, at a nearby school. The Ananda School today is a well-organised educational centre with 240 children. Pupils receive schooling, a hot lunch and medical care when needed. The paddy-fields were sold by local staff between 2006–2008 for reasons explained in the interview 2.1. In 2023–2024, apprentices from the Rapperswil-based company Geberit, a long-term supporter of the Usthi Foundation, renovated the sanitary facilities and drinking water supply, repaired buildings and installed a new steam kitchen.

2.1.3

Puri Penthakata School since 1992

The third Usthi Foundation school, in the fishing settlement of Penthakata on the Indian Ocean, was inaugurated on 20 September 1992 by the Chief Minister of Odisha. Penthakata is an informal settlement of fisher families on the edge of the pilgrimage town of Puri, at the time home to around 30,000 migrants, about half of them children. Their forbears had moved there in the 1930s/1940s from the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh, lying to the South. At the time, there were no schools and children spent their time on the beach and in the streets.

Kurt and Edeltrud Bürki knew Puri well from their stops on the journey from Kolkata to Odisha State. The Indian Project Manager had highlighted the educational needs in Penthakata and secured approximately 8,000 m² of land from the town authorities for a school. A health centre was attached to the school, providing medical care at regular intervals for children and staff. In 1995, around a dozen health workers were trained up to serve the fishing settlement, following Usthi's successful approach at the Somagiri Tribal Health Centre 2.2.1. Usthi was able to make this investment thanks to Swissair, on the occasion of their 60th anniversary, having made a substantial initial donation and having doubled all donations from staff fundraising. The Irish Embassy in India also contributed a significant start-up sum.

The Penthakata School, teaching in English, started with 200 children – twice the originally planned number, owing to high demand. By 1995, the school was expanded to cover kindergarten to Grade 8 and could then take 300 pupils. Since 2014, around 400 children have been educated up to



Fishing settlement of Penthakata in Puri, 1991



Penthakata School, 2019

Grade 10. As state recognition is lacking for the final two years, a neighbouring school is paid to administer the final examinations. Pupils learn English alongside the national language Hindi, the local Oriya language and Telugu, the language of their ethnicity, each with individual scripts.

From 2010–2012 here too in a social project, apprentices from the Rapperswil-based company Geberit renovated sanitary facilities and the kitchen at Penthakata School and equipped the nearby Usthi hospital in Bhubaneswar 3.2 with new washrooms.

Puri Waste Management in Penthakata 2024-2026

The polluted beaches in the fishing village of Penthakata, where Usthi operates a school ^{2.1.3}, shocked the Usthi Foundation Board during a visit in 2022. Waste disposal by the Penthakata municipality is inadequate and the unsegregated waste, dumped there, poses a health hazard for the population, particularly children at the Usthi school.

Penthakata, officially home to 37,000 people, generates nearly 12 tonnes of waste per day. The city of Puri's daily collection service is not tied to a schedule. Consequently, households dispose of waste as convenient – a mixture of domestic refuse, excrement, chemicals and menstrual waste – on the nearby beach. The tides wash much of this waste into the Indian Ocean. Microplastics and chemical residues return to inhabitants' plates when consuming seafood.

Faced with this situation, it was decided to take active waste management measures. Usthi has developed a concept for a sustainable waste management system, together with: their partner organisation responsible for the Penthakata school, an Indian waste expert, Eawag (the water research institute of the ETH University in Zurich), the City Authority of Puri and the Penthakata Village Council. This system is designed to be operated by the residents themselves and was tested in a pilot phase in 2025 under a Memorandum of Understanding.

After the stable establishment of the project in 2026, Usthi is responsible for integrating waste management into the curriculum at all schools in Penthakata. Teachers are trained and encouraged to view waste as a natural resource that can be recycled. Regular community beach clean-ups are conducted to raise awareness. The City of Puri is responsible for organising and financing the segregation and disposal of household waste in Penthakata.



Beach cleanup with volunteers, 2024

Bengaluru Kolar School 2006-2014

Bhastara Thaddeus School 2006-2025

Following Usthi Foundation's temporary withdrawal, from Usthi India projects in 2006 ^{2.1}, financial resources could be made available for other projects. At the same time, the new Executive Director of Usthi brought in experience from the educational sector with an Indian partner organisation in Hyderabad. Usthi therefore decided to take on responsibility for their school in **Kolar**.

Kolar, 100 km east of Bengaluru, was at that time India's largest gold mine. Gold was extracted under inhumane conditions in underground tunnels, by a state-owned company. Only uneducated members of the lowest caste (Dalits) performed this work. The gold mine company established schools for their workers' children. When gold prices collapsed, mining ceased in 2001 and the schools were closed. The Indian partner organisation reopened the school, now teaching in English, in the Kolar Gold Fields for the children of unemployed Dalits and Usthi assumed financial responsibility in 2006. With increasing pupil numbers, more school space was needed. Land was acquired and a two-storey school building was constructed, providing space for two kindergartens and ten school classes. Usthi supported the Kolar school until financial responsibility was returned to the Indian partner organisation in 2014, which continues to operate the school today.

Following a magazine article, in the *Schweizer Familie*, by Kurt Bürki about a project concerning a home for girls ^{2.3.1}, entrepreneur Thaddeus Getzmann approached the Usthi Foundation with a wish to establish a school for neglected children in India. As Getzmann committed to financial support for the school over at least five years, an agreement was made with Usthi to establish the **Thaddeus School** which opened in 2006 in Bhastara, 60 km north



Newly opened school building of the Kolar School, 2008



Children of the Thaddeus School, 2012



Students of the Thaddeus School on their way home, 2013

of Kolkata. The Indian partner organisation operating the Kolar school also took responsibility for operations at the Thaddeus School.

The area around Bhastara is predominantly agricultural and there was no school teaching in English. As in Kolar, classes initially took place in rented rooms. As student numbers grew, land was purchased and a two-storey school building was constructed, providing education from kindergarten to the school leaving qualification, after Grade 10.

Thaddeus Getzmann put his heart and soul into the school and visited it regularly, maintained personal contact with management and teachers and, together with his family and friends, continued to finance operations. For some time, it has been possible to cover a part of the Thaddeus School's expenses locally. After 20 years of Thaddeus Getzmann's personal dedication, Usthi, at the end of 2025, handed over full responsibility for the school to the Indian partner organisation. The latter had developed significantly over the years and has since established its own funding sources to sustain the school.

Kathmandu Shangri-La Orphanage 2006-2015

2.1.6

Hyderabad Amboth Tanda School 2006-2008

After ending collaboration with Usthi India in 2006 and resources were able to be freed up ¹, Usthi assumed temporary financial responsibility for two additional educational projects.

In the mid.1990s, Usthi, on behalf of a foundation operating in healthcare, evaluated applications from a German and a Swiss-Indian relief organisation. Valuable relationships with local authorities in Kathmandu and Hyderabad were created by this contact.

Usthi was able to apply its experience from successfully rehabilitating orphans and children with only one living parent into life in Kolkata ^{2.3.1} to the **Shangri-La Orphans educational project** of a German relief organisation in Kathmandu. In addition to supporting school leavers' introduction into the labour market, Usthi contributed to solar infrastructure and a school construction in Jumla, western Nepal. After the 2015 earthquake emergency relief programme and the subsequent reconstruction of destroyed homes, it was an appropriate moment to end collaboration with the German relief organisation. In its stead, planning then began for an educational project with a local partner in Nepal ^{2.1.8}. A further collaboration from 2006 provided for pre-school children in **Amboth Tanda**, 60 km south-east of Hyderabad. This school was founded by a relief organisation, led by an Indian businessman living in Switzerland. Following three years of temporary financial support, Usthi has continued to keep in contact with the relief organisation.



Children of the Amboth Tanda School during a visit as part of the evaluation, 2000

Hyderabad Back-to-School, Tutoring, Work-Related Skills Training since 2008

After extensive discussions with a Hyderabad-based couple, the idea for a long-term collaboration emerged. The couple brought not only 23 years of experience running educational institutes but also entrepreneurial skills in setting up small businesses to fund education for children from the lowest social strata. This led to the establishment of an Indian foundation as Usthi's partner, with which, today, Usthi continues to implement various projects.

The work began in 2007 by setting up a children's home for 16 street children in Hyderabad 2.3.2. The following year, individual **Back-to-School support** was introduced for children from impoverished families who had become unable to finance their children's schooling. Families affected by poverty often depend on their children's earnings for survival. As a result, these children have no opportunity to receive an education. Through school sponsorships, Usthi currently covers a part of the costs of e.g. school fees, uniforms and books for around 250 children.



School bus in Hyderabad, 2016



Course participants at the Work-Related Skills Training Center, 2022

From 2008, Usthi and the Hyderabad partner organisation also developed a **work-related skills training** centre, offering 16 courses for over 1,300 qualified students annually. Training ranges from beginners' to advanced courses, e.g. in textile processing, medical laboratory work, beautician/hair-care and electrical installation, complemented by computer and English courses. Programmes are continually adapted to the labour market requirements, in close consultation with local businesses. Participants maintain detailed portfolios and attend weekly assessments. After successful completion, students receive state-recognised certificates. The centre is extremely highly rated: nearly 80% of graduates gain employment and 10% become self-employed. Usthi subsidises essential equipment, e. g. sewing machines or toolkits, for some of the graduates without financial means to start their own small business. In parallel, our partner runs a profitable social enterprise in textile processing 2.3.3.

Since 2009, **tutoring centres** have been offering children from impoverished families and attending schools near our partner organisation's campuses, a safe after-school environment and learning support. Good grades reduce the risk of school drop-out. Currently, 375 children visit 14 tutoring centres in Hyderabad.

Dhading, Nepal Empowering Children & Families since 2019

Drawing on extensive experience, together with a German relief organisation for education, health and youth integration 2.1.6, the Usthi Foundation came to the decision to set up its own project in Nepal. Completion of the post-earthquake reconstruction in 2015 provided the ideal moment. Together with a new Nepalese partner organisation, Usthi chose a new path by launching a project in 2019 in Dhading District, west of Kathmandu, focusing on co-operation with existing local structures rather than building new schools. Usthi today promotes improved teaching quality in 15 public schools serving approximately 2,300 children, inter alia



Support for families in Dhading District, 2022

through teacher-training and infrastructure improvements such as libraries or science laboratories.

As a second important string to their bow, the project also improves access to education for children from impoverished and marginalised families. Usthi school sponsorships finance schooling for around 150 children and for a further 22 visually impaired children living in a children's home, who, with special support, are able to attend mainstream schools. The project improves family living conditions and impoverished families receive advice and start-up capital for a small business. Raising goats, pigs, or buffaloes for sale allows families to increase income and cover their children's educational costs themselves. This integrated approach promotes community self-reliance in Dhading and ensures children attend school, protecting them from child labour and sexual exploitation.

Finally, the Nepal project raises awareness on children's rights, child marriage, child-rearing, health and hygiene through workshops and discussions with children, parents and teachers.

Health

2.2

Somagiri Tribal Health Centre, Health Network, Health and Education Project for small children 1984-2026

2.2.1

In the district capital of Keonjhar in the north of the Indian state of Odisha, a local charity, starting in 1977, received seven years of support from an English foundation to establish healthcare in hard-to-reach isolated villages of indigenous communities. Initially, services were provided by mobile doctors and nursing staff ("Door-to-door Service") and from 1982 a small hospital was established on a 4-hectare site, which the Odisha government leased to Usthi's local partner for 99 years. The hospital is located in Somagiri, 60 km south of Keonjhar.

Kurt Bürki, as President of Terre des Hommes India (1979-1991), together with his wife Edeltrud, regularly visited the orphanage in Keonjhar supported by TdH-I. In 1984 following the withdrawal of English funding, they discovered that the local organisation was facing financial difficulties and had been forced to close the hospital.



Medical consultation at the Tribal Health Centre, mid-1980s



Community health worker in a village, 2022



Day care center in Keonjhar District, 2016

In the same year, the Usthi Foundation made it possible for the hospital to reopen and later to develop into today's **Tribal Health Centre (THC)**. The centre now has 12 beds and is managed by a medical director, a pharmacist, a lab technician and 24 staff members. In the mornings, outpatient services are provided at the hospital. In the afternoons, the medical chief and two nurses visit surrounding villages. Each week, specialists from Keonjhar in gynaecology, paediatrics, sonography and dentistry visit and once per month other specialists are in attendance for orthopaedics, dermatology and internal medicine. The THC contributes to medical care for around 150,000 residents across 133 villages. In-patients and out-patients pay a small fee for treatment.

To integrate the THC more closely into the public health system, a maternity unit was opened in 2013 which, for several years, brought the hospital reimbursement from the state health insurance. Simultaneously, a state incentive programme encouraged women to give birth in public hospitals or maternity homes. This contributed to the under-utilisation of THC's maternity unit.

In 2025, an Indian consulting firm, specialising in healthcare, conducted an evaluation of the THC to determine which services of the THC, established 43 years ago, should play a role in regional healthcare in the future. The comprehensive findings highlighted that the THC is highly valued by the population due to its proximity to nearby villages, easily accessible and unbureaucratic outpatient services and the outreach care provided by hospital staff and health workers. At the same time, they identified significant deficiencies in the quality of medical services and hospital. The Usthi Board recognised the need for action. However, subsequent discussions with the partner organisation showed that the views on how the deficiencies could be addressed were not compatible. Consequently, a phased withdrawal from the project in 2026 was decided by the Usthi Foundation Board. A gradual reduction of the commitment is intended to ensure a fair process for the affected employees.

Since 1991, Usthi, together with the local partner, had developed a **health network** in initially 16 villages, expanding to 31 by 1996 and today 36 "adopted villages" around Somagiri. Women from these villages are trained at the THC as health

workers, providing preventive care, medical support and referrals to the THC. These services have also helped reduce distrust towards conventional medical institutions. Today, there is a network of 42 female health workers across the 36 villages. Approximately 25,000 out-patient consultations are conducted annually – two-thirds at the THC and one-third by health workers and the medical director during village visits.

Recognising that many indigenous infants were intellectually under-stimulated and poorly nourished, Usthi developed, in 2012, an early childhood support project in the Somagiri area, called the **Health and Education Project (HEP)** with the local partner. The project now includes nine day-care centres, supporting around 250 children aged 3–6 years. Care and playful creativity are provided by state social workers (Anganwadi Workers) in partnership with the Usthi partner. Children receive a nutritious hot meal each day. The meals, land and buildings are supplied by the state. Usthi, via their local partner, makes a contribution with 12 trained social workers and some operating costs. These workers strengthen the HEP's presence in their villages and conduct regular health checks. Usthi contributions also allow the purchase of additional toys and educational materials and fund regular staff training.

Kolkata, Dakshindari-Slum Children's Hospital 1996-2006

2.2.2

Infrastructure Development 2001-2004

Following the Indo-Pakistani War in 1971, many Hindus fled from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to India. In northern Kolkata, the Dakshindari slum was created with around 70,000 residents and lacking all basic necessities. In 1975, the future Indian Project Manager of the Usthi Foundation began establishing schools through his own charity, which also provided meals and healthcare services. The local Authorities gradually improved roads and water supply.

With support from a development organisation in the Tessin (Switzerland), a small **children's hospital** with an outpatient clinic was established in 1992. When this funding collapsed in 1996, Usthi assumed responsibility, renovated the building and trained mobile health workers based on the model established in Somagiri 2.2.1. In the year 2000, the hospital treated 443 children and adolescents as in-patients and 17,153 children, adolescents and adults as out-patients. The 40 hospital staff were complemented by a network of eight health workers. When collaboration with the Indian Usthi Foundation was suspended in 2006, Usthi handed over management of the Dakshindari children's hospital to the city of Kolkata.

In 2001, the Swiss Rotary District 1980, led by Rotary Club Schwyz in Central Switzerland, conducted a feasibility study for improving infrastructure in the Dakshindari slum (**Dakshindari Development Project, "DDP"**). Implementation cost USD 170,000. Under Usthi's leadership, key infrastructure was created: five children's playgrounds, two large toilet facilities, approximately 1,000 m of sewerage, a deep well was bored for water supply and an additional floor was added to the children's hospital. The city financed electricity for the toilets and connection to the mains water supply. Upon project completion in 2004, the facilities were handed over to municipal authorities. Over the 20 years or so since then, Dakshindari has changed significantly. The toilet facilities and part of the playgrounds were built over.



Water supply infrastructure, 2002



Community health worker on a home visit, 2003

Protection & Empowerment

Kolkata Bangur Children's Home 1989-2016

Even decades ago, countless children were fighting for their daily survival on the streets of India's major cities. Life on the streets was extremely dangerous for them, and they could fall into the hands of human traffickers at all time. Edeltrud Bürki felt deep empathy for Indian women and girls and wanted to help raise awareness for and alleviate these conditions. She actively engaged to provide information on these issues within Switzerland.

When Terre des Hommes India (TDH-I) – of which Kurt Bürki was President from 1979–1991 – discontinued its adoption programme in 1988, due to changing political and legal regulations in India, a solution had to be found for the children awaiting adoption and housed in the Kolkata TDH-I administrative building. Boys were adopted within India or placed in orphanages. Usthi assumed responsibility for the girls and also the carers. A permanent residential group was



Group photo of the Bangur Girls, 2001



Bangur Girls residential community, 2012

established in the administrative building, initially housing ten girls, with a "house mother" and four additional staff. Over many years, girls were admitted to this "Rehabilitation of Stray Girls" project, from impoverished single-parent households and very low-income families, as well as girls assigned to it from prisons or social services.

In 1995, two residential groups, each with ten girls, moved into a new building on Bangur Avenue, henceforth the girls became known as the "Bangur Girls". They attended nearby schools with English as the teaching language. Due to the suspension of collaboration with Usthi India in 2006, the residential groups had to relocate to a new house, creating a period of uncertainty during which no new girls could be admitted. In 2008, a second property was added for older girls attending work-related skills training or college. Over the years, the residential group gradually released the trained adolescents into their new self-sufficient lives, many becoming successful employees or entrepreneurs. The project concluded in 2016.

Hyderabad Children's Homes and Women's Homes, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation since 2007

Collaboration with a new Indian partner organisation in Hyderabad 2.1.7 began in 2007 with a **children's home** for vulnerable children (orphans, children who have only one living parent or street children) from slums and red-light areas. Today, there are four family communities, housing 60 children, attending Usthi's partner organisation's schools. House mothers care for the children round the clock, receiving education, nutrition and medical care when needed.

Together with their Indian partner, Usthi combats sexual abuse of young women, child marriage and human trafficking. Sexual abuse of girls and boys is known within families and the red-light districts. Girls are also exploited in "temple prostitution". The practice of ritualised prostitution has deep historical roots. In modern times, this has evolved into the sexual exploitation of Yoginis or Devadasis, girls usually admitted to a Hindu temple in childhood from the casteless poor section of society ("Scheduled Castes"). Although temple prostitution was banned by the State in 1988, it continues in rural regions, particularly in Telangana, the state to which Hyderabad belongs.

Since 2013, together with local groups connected to the families of the Yoginis, Usthi has provided refuge in residential communities ("**women's homes**") for temple girls and other young women who have experienced sexual exploitation. The communities are on the partner organisation's grounds, offering psychological support help to the afflicted process

their trauma. Currently, 50 young women of varied backgrounds live together in the five Usthi-funded women's homes for 7-9 months. Parallel work-related skills training and their reintegration into society, without disclosing their traumatic past, enable them to achieve financial independence and lead normal lives.

Since 2014, in co-operation with self-help groups and in consultation with local community representatives, the partner organisation has run a continuous **awareness campaign**, reaching over 12,000 people annually in Hyderabad and surrounding areas. Victims can often be identified, who can then be offered protection and work-related training.



Awareness campaign for protection against abuse, 2022



Residential community of the children's homes, 2012

Land Distribution

2.4

Thanks to the success of the school in Usthi ^{2.1.1}, co-operation with wealthier circles increased in the region. In 1987 a wealthy family made a large donation of cultivated land and lakes in **Lakshmikantapur**, 15 km south of Usthi. This offered the opportunity for an autonomous food supply for the Usthi school centre.

However, the farming venture proved unsuccessful and a poor investment. The demographic complexities of the Indian caste system and complicated local conditions, combined with the lack of experience and knowledge of the local partner and the Usthi Foundation, led to the project's failure. After two years, the project was discontinued. The landowner, whose family had not resided in Lakshmikantapur for generations, agreed to Usthi's proposal to distribute the cultivated land and lakes to landless local inhabitants. By means of legally binding deeds, Usthi distributed the land and ponds in 1990 to 76 families.

Following a commission undertaken by Kurt Bürki for other aid organisations in Bhawanipatna, **Kalahandi District**, Odisha, local Authorities offered Usthi land for cultivation. Between 1991-1992 and with official approval, Usthi distributed the land to 21 landless families. Usthi provided materials for house construction and technical infrastructure for irrigation wells, while the farming families carried out the work themselves. Due to the region's remoteness and long travel times to get there, Usthi did not establish a long-term project.



Discussion about land distribution in Kalahandi, around 1989

Usthi Chronicle

1976

Kurt and Edeltrud Bürki set up a street kitchen in Kolkata for street-children. Decision taken to establish a social institution in the surroundings of Kolkata

1985

Registration of the Usthi Foundation in Rapperswil-Jona, Switzerland, and the Usthi Foundation India in Kolkata

1984

As its second project, Usthi assumes responsibility for the Tribal Health Centre in Somagiri, state Odisha. From 1991, a network of health workers is established in the surrounding villages (until 2026)

1977

Inauguration of the Bhor-e-Phool School in the village of Usthi, 50 km south of Kolkata (until 2005). The Usthi Foundation takes its name from this location



1987

Inauguration of the Ananda School in Hudarait, 20 km east of Kolkata



1992

Inauguration of the third Usthi school in the fishing village of Penthakata in Puri



1998

Edeltrud Bürki-Büchel, co-founder of Usthi, passes away, aged 60

1989

Establishment of a residential group for girls (Bangur Children's Home) in Kolkata (until 2016)

1996

Usthi assumes responsibility for a children's hospital in the Dakshindari slum of Kolkata (until 2006)



2001

Inauguration of the Usthi Hospital in Bhubaneswar, which represents Usthi's largest investment in a social enterprise to date. A proportion of the profit-orientated social enterprise's profits is used to subsidise Usthi's social projects

2005

Emergency relief operation by Usthi in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu following the devastating tsunami of 26 December 2004

2006

Usthi temporarily suspends funding for projects managed by Usthi Foundation India

Professionalisation of the Usthi Foundation in Switzerland begins with the employment of an external Executive Director

2019

With a new partner organisation, Usthi develops an education project in the rural Dhading district, Nepal



2008

Resumption of funding for Usthi Foundation India projects under new local management

2015

Usthi provides emergency relief after a severe earthquake in Nepal

2013

The Usthi Foundation obtains the Zewo certification

2012

Founder Kurt Bürki steps down from the Board of Trustees

Launch of the Health and Education Project (HEP) for small children around Somagiri, in the common ground between health and education

2024

Launch of a new project in co-operation with a local partner and the ETH Zurich Water Research Institute (Eawag) to improve waste management in Penthakata, Puri (until 2026)

2007

Start of co-operation with a project partner to support two schools: in Kolar east of Bengaluru (until 2014) and in Bhastara north of Kolkata (until 2025)

Start of co-operation with a project partner in Hyderabad to establish children's homes. In 2008, tutoring courses are added and in 2009, vocational training courses and "Back-to-School" support. Projects in the area of Protection & Empowerment (women's homes, awareness campaigns against sexual exploitation) follow in 2013 and 2014

2020

A renewed Board of Trustees and a new Executive Director take over the management of Usthi

The global COVID-19 pandemic brings normal life in the projects to a standstill for months and requires Usthi to provide both material emergency aid and creative solutions to maintain the projects over the next two years



Emergency Relief

Regarded as a well-established, agile and highly respected social institution in India, the Usthi Foundation Switzerland has been responding since 1986, on multiple occasions, to recurring natural disasters, e.g. floods, cyclones, earthquakes. Usthi's local partners are so well networked that they can quickly mobilise medical staff and logistics specialists with immediate access to transport, medicines, tarpaulins, cooking equipment and emergency rations.

Notably, in 2004 during the Indian Ocean earthquake and the subsequent devastating **tsunami affecting Tamil Nadu**, Usthi provided immediate aid to over 35,000 survivors. In the immediate aftermath, Usthi organised the construction of 75 new boats for Indian Ocean fishing villages.

In 2011, following a devastating **earthquake in Sikkim**, Usthi deployed the only foreign emergency team on-site, receiving strong support from the Government of Sikkim. Entire villages were buried by landslides triggered by the quake and aid could only reach these remote Himalayan valleys via hazardous routes.

In 2015, **Nepal** was struck by a magnitude 7.2 **earthquake** lasting 25 seconds, with nearly 9,000 fatalities and over 20,000 injured. Upon news of the quake, Usthi India immediately mobilised a relief team from Kolkata. Five trucks carrying 50 tonnes of aid materials were sent to Kathmandu, escorted, to avoid plundering, by the Indian army to the Nepalese border and subsequently by the Nepalese police to distribution centres.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** (2020-2021) represented a new form of disaster. Border closures, complete school shutdowns and curfews brought public life in India to a standstill, causing the collapse of both the economy and the healthcare system. Millions of migrant workers lost their jobs and walked hundreds of kilometres back to their rural homes with little more than the clothes on their backs.

Usthi provided urgently needed digital tools to its schools, enabling children to continue education at home. Home schooling became operational within a short time, thanks to the dedication of school staff. Usthi projects also supplied food rations to the families of schoolchildren to maintain their health. In Hyderabad, Usthi's local partner supported families of the children receiving Usthi aid and also ran street kitchens for migrant workers returning to their villages. This emergency response challenged Usthi intensively for two years.



Emergency relief after the tsunami in Tamil Nadu, 2005



Emergency relief during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020

The Self-Financing of the Project Partners

3

From the outset, the Usthi movement set itself a goal that donations and its aid organisation should one day become superfluous. An important path towards this goal is promoting partner organisations' financial independence. The beneficiaries' minor financial contributions, e.g. school fees and medical treatment charges, can only play a modest role, because Usthi's target group are families afflicted by poverty. It is more important, for the self-sufficiency of the projects, that partner organisations develop and operate value-generating activities to subsidise social projects. Self-financing of social projects gives the local partner greater independence from donors, higher social acceptance and enhanced personal reputation which in turn benefits the social projects themselves.

3.1

Kolkata Trading Enterprise 1978-1985

Rapperswil Usthi Shop 1979-1991

During their first visit to Kolkata in 1976, the Bürki couple met two different local figures. Together with the first, the Indian project leader, they built up Usthi projects until 2005. In May 1978, they founded a **trading enterprise**, together with the second, a young woman. It was this partner's wish to offer disadvantaged women in India a way to establish themselves independently in society.

The fair-trade enterprise supported women in sourcing raw materials for their handicrafts, promoted the formation of production cooperatives and created a platform to sell their products at fair prices. When the company lost its lease on their production and administration building in 1983, the Swiss Confederation assisted in an unbureaucratic way with purchasing a property in Kolkata, thus saving the jobs of 200 women. This significant service enterprise still exists today, working with more than 10,000 artisans in 100 production



Seamstresses of the trading company in Kolkata, mid-1980s

groups. Since 1985, the social trading enterprise has been profitable and is no longer dependent on donations, serving as a strong example of sustainable international co-operation. Usthi continues to maintain a friendly relationship with the enterprise and its Management.

The Kolkata trading project led in 1979 to the establishment of the **Usthi Shop** in Rapperswil, initially the sole outlet for the products in Switzerland, selling textiles, leather goods, jute handicrafts, bags and wooden toys at a respectable profit. Half of the profit was invested in the trading enterprise, the other half in the Bhore-Phool school. Later, the trading enterprise supplied "Third World shops" (fair-trade shops) throughout Switzerland via Usthi.

The commitment of the Bürkis and the local partner was mutually beneficial – the enterprise in Kolkata quickly gained prestige, whilst Usthi built strong contacts with local donors through the Rapperswil shop. In 1991, Usthi handed over the shop's management to the association "Diagonal" (since 1998 "claro fair trade", Rapperswil-Jona).

Bhubaneswar Usthi Hospital

since 2001

The Usthi Hospital in Bhubaneswar, the capital of Odisha State, is profit-orientated and one of many hospitals. How did the Usthi Foundation come to establish such a hospital? The idea arose from discussions with their Indian project leader in the mid-1990s, seeking a project focused on generating profit through the Indian partner organisation to subsidise social projects. This aligned with Usthi's fundamental strategy of increasing local value-creation to reduce financial dependence on foreign donations.

The Hospital pursued two Usthi objectives: to provide the population with high-quality medical care at moderate prices – and on special campaign days, even free of charge – whilst simultaneously generating profits as a social enterprise to subsidise the social projects. Usthi had taken a strategic step by attracting donors, not for a social project but for a profit centre in the form of a modern hospital with advanced equipment.

At the end of 1997, the State of Odisha transferred well-situated land to Usthi Foundation India. After three years of construction, the hospital was inaugurated on 4th April 2001 by two indigenous children, symbolising that the hospital was built for the general population, not for the elite. At CHF 800,000, it was the largest initial investment the Usthi Foundation had taken on. After a few years and with a repayable loan from Usthi, the hospital added a second floor, increasing the number of beds at first from 15 to 28 and finally to 40.

The Usthi Hospital became profitable within three years and is operated as an independent entity under Usthi India. According to an agreement, a proportion of the annual net profit goes to supporting the schools in Hudarait (Ananda) and Penthakata. Since this profit is used for charitable purposes, the hospital is tax-exempt. Between 2004–2024, (based on historical exchange rates) approximately CHF 310,000 in hospital profits were channelled into social projects co-managed by Usthi and Usthi India.



Operating theater of Usthi Hospital, 2016

The hospital is well-respected and offers a broad medical range, including gynaecology, obstetrics and neonatology, internal medicine, surgery and radiology. Around 100 staff members, including doctors, work alongside numerous visiting/affiliated physicians. Recruitment considers not only qualifications and experience but also the furtherance of individuals from disadvantaged families.

Hyderabad Garment Factory

since 2011

Usthi's Indian partner in Hyderabad operates a textile processing enterprise, the "Garment Factory". The initial investment in 2011 was made jointly by Usthi and their local partner. The more than 30 employees were initially successful graduates from the work-related skills training courses 2.1.7. Today, local seamstresses form the backbone of this successful production centre. Contacts with buyers and trading companies reveal population needs, which can be directly incorporated into the training modules of the work-related skills training courses.

The enterprise supplies the Indian market and exports abroad, mainly to the USA. Designed as a social enterprise, part of the generated profit is reinvested into the business, while the remainder goes towards financing work-related skills training courses.



Garment Factory in Hyderabad, 2022

Development of Usthi as an Organisation

4

In September 1976, Edeltrud and Kurt Bürki began with a soup kitchen in Kolkata. The Bürkis wanted to give back to society a portion of the good life they had enjoyed in Switzerland. It was never their intention to create an organisation; rather, their social engagement was to be funded from the family budget.

When, in 1984, the turnover of the Usthi movement reached almost CHF 400,000, the Canton of St. Gallen required, from 1985 onwards, that the tax-exempt aid be legally safeguarded by establishing a formal legal organisation. The Bürkis decided to register a foundation ¹. Initially, the **Board of Trustees** consisted solely of Edeltrud and Kurt Bürki. After Edeltrud's death in 1998, the Board was expanded in 1999 to include the two eldest children of the Bürki family and two external, non-family members.

As part of a reorganisation of the foundation in 2012, which also included certification of Zewo (a Swiss foundation that certifies charities for transparency and responsible use of donations), the Board of Trustees was increased to seven members. The founder, Kurt Bürki, stepped down but remained involved as an advisor and occasionally as interim Executive Director.

Due to differences of opinion regarding the management of projects and the foundation itself, the Board of Trustees was almost completely renewed in 2020. With the new Board and a new management team, Usthi confronted the major challenges of the COVID pandemic in India and Nepal and set course for the future with a new strategy 2023–2026. The Board has always served on an unsalaried basis.

From the outset, the **management** of Usthi was in the hands of Kurt and Edeltrud Bürki and after his partner's death in 1998, solely with Kurt. A crucial and indispensable role has been played by the volunteers, who have supported the foundation in accounting, private donor management and clerical work, the Usthi Shop, event organisation and, during the first decades, also auditing.

In 2006, the professionalisation of the organisation began with the appointment of the first external Executive Director. This marked the end of Usthi's pioneer phase after 30 years and the establishment of structures beyond the founding family. However, Kurt Bürki has had temporarily to step

into the top job during each Executive Director change and the ensuing interregnum.

Since 2012, the Head Office has employed two or more staff members who are responsible for management, project support, communication and fundraising. In 2020, a position was created specifically for project support. Currently, the work of five employees of the Usthi Foundation equates to 3.1 FTE (full time equivalent).

Board of Trustees

from	until	Name	Surname
1985	1998	Edeltrud	Bürki-Büchel
1985	2012	Kurt	Bürki
1999	2012	Esther	Widmer-Brändle
1999	2019	Simon	Widmer
1999	2020	Patrick	Bürki
1999		Gabriela	Bürki
2011	2019	Simone	Thompson
2012	2019	Gallus	Römer
2012	2019	Silvia	Day-Tognola
2012	2019	Josef	Keller
2020		Felix	Senn
2020		René	Graber
2020		Urs	Jaisli
2020		Daniel	Kempter
2020		Matthias	Manz
2021		Christa	Vollrath
2026		Claudia	Bodmer-Furrer
2026		Annette	Schär

Employees

from	until	Name	Surname	Function
2003	2008	Sonja	Schepull	Administration and Accounting
2006	2009	Beatrice	Kasser	Executive Director
2007	2016	Manuela	Zuber	Communications and Administration
2010	2010	Bernike	Szabo	Executive Director
2011	2012	Corinna	Seiberth	Project Development HEP, Somagiri
2012	2012	Patricia	Ringger	Project Coordination HEP, Somagiri
2012	2015	Martin	Ramsauer	Programme Management
2012	2016	Judith	Schuler	Executive Director
2015	2015	Stephanie	Theis	Project Coordination Emergency Relief Nepal
2015	2016	Fabienne-Alexia	Müller	Programme Management
2016	2020	Tanja	Lirgg	Executive Director
2017	2017	Bettina	Badertscher	Event Management
2017	2017	Daniela	Reinhard	Fundraising
2018	2021	Olga	Egli	Communications and Fundraising
2019		Christian	Rübensaal	Administration and Fundraising
2020		Alessandra	Grosse	Executive Director
2020		Mirjam	Hirzel	Project Coordination & Deputy Executive Director
2021	2023	Tiana	Glatt	Communications and Fundraising
2023	2024	Franka	Hüttche	Communications and Fundraising
2023		Jonathan	Schuler	Finance
2024		Lucia	Messer	Communications and Fundraising

Volunteers

from	until	Name	Surname	Field
1976	1998	Edeltrud	Bürki-Büchel	Founder, Executive Director
1976	2002	Viktor	Büchel	Accounting, Audit
1976		Kurt	Bürki	Founder, Executive Director, Advisor
1977		Martin	Niederöst	IT Support
1981	1984	Jenny	Meystre	Donation Administration
1985		Donatella	Suter	Donation Administration, and from 2014 Accounting
2002	2017	Paul	Day	Translation
2007	2007	Gallus	Römer	Controlling
2012	2012	Anne	Sablotny	Project Implementation HEP, Somagiri
2012	2014	Eva	Mösching	Project Implementation HEP, Somagiri
2015		Tim	Dean	Translation
2017	2022	Stefan	Schumacher	Graphics
2023	2023	An-Ki	Vogel	Graphics
2024	2024	Heather	O'Connell	Interim Evaluation Education Project Nepal
2024	2024	Grace	Kingston	Interim Evaluation Education Project Nepal
2024		Luca	Mondgenast	Graphics

For decades, countless other volunteers have contributed greatly to Usthi in the Usthi Shop (until 1991) and at recurring events, for example by assisting at the annual Usthi Event or running the Usthi stall at the Rapperswil Christmas Market.

For Usthi, impact is, of course, visible in numbers, but above all in the pathway through life of the children and young people, reached by the projects. Many former pupils and residents of the children's and women's homes still maintain contact with the local project teams and with Usthi. Their reports and experiences provide impressive insights into how effective the support is, over what timeframe changes occur and how Usthi projects have left their mark on people's lives.

How do Usthi's projects make an impact?

Kurt and Edeltrud Bürki began their involvement with a vision: "We empower children and young people in need to build a self-determined and dignified life". To this day, this mission forms the foundation of Usthi's work. The projects are designed so that children and young adults can develop in a supportive environment and, despite a difficult start in life, are enabled to build an independent future.

Usthi's projects focus on children and young adults burdened by poverty and marginalisation. The latter are supported during formative phases such as schooling and work-related training, receive protection in a safe environment during difficult moments and have access to medical services.

Within these objectives, particular attention is paid to fostering the development of girls and young women, who continue to face societal discrimination. This emphasis is evident not only in the projects for the Bangur Girls [2.3.1](#) and the women's homes [2.3.2](#) but runs through all Usthi projects. Gender balance, for example, is considered when admitting new schoolchildren and work-related skills training courses are explicitly designed to target young women. Today, 90% of the skills training graduates are female.

From the very beginning, Usthi has prioritised involving families, citizen-run organisations, authorities and the private sector in the planning, implementation and expansion of projects. By working together with local communities, long-term solutions can be developed together, tailored to the needs and circumstances of each project and geographical region.

A decisive factor in achieving lasting change is the strengthening of local project partners. Usthi supports them in their

advancement, expanding their skills and helping them to build their own economic resources [2.3](#). On the one hand, staff of the partner organisations are part of the impact mechanism through their daily activities. On the other hand, furthering the development of the staff itself also generates its own impact. Usthi's *modus operandi* contributes to the development of stable, professional organisations which take on local responsibility and can operate effectively in the long term, even independently of Usthi.

Usthi follows a holistic approach to improve, fundamentally, the living conditions of children and young people. Its origin is based on Kurt and Edeltrud Bürki's insight that education and health must be promoted hand in hand. The health and well-being of children directly influence their development and ability to learn. However, a child's future prospects are limited if, even while healthy and secure, it is not supported with appropriate schooling and further education. The holistic approach therefore incorporates the interaction of three focus areas – Education, Health and Protection & Empowerment – and benefits from their synergy.

How much funding has been allocated so far?

Impact is created through targeted projects and Usthi has used donations to expand these over the decades. An overview of the annual financial support for projects in India and Nepal shows the scale and development of activities and investments on the ground.

Since 1977, Usthi has carefully documented income, expenditures and assets. The financial reports of partner organisations in India and Nepal have always been audited by state-authorised auditors, and the figures are reviewed by Usthi Headquarters in Switzerland before being discussed with the project partners. The annual accounts of the Usthi Foundation Switzerland are audited, published and monitored by the Swiss Federal Supervisory Authority for Foundations (ESA). Every five years, an in-depth review of finances and structures is conducted by Zewo (a Swiss foundation that certifies charities for transparency and responsible use of donations). Since 2013, Usthi has been Zewo-certified, confirming that donations are used appropriately, economically and in a results-orientated manner.

Over the course of 49 years, approximately 25 million Swiss francs in donations have been transferred to India and Nepal. Peaks in transfers represent larger investments or emergency relief actions.

How can Usthi's impact be measured?

Anyone who has visited the Usthi projects and listened to project leaders, teachers, schoolchildren, parents, patients and the countless employees of the partner organisations knows that Usthi has had a lasting effect in India and Nepal. But how can this impact be measured and substantiated? During the first 25 years, all work for Usthi Switzerland was carried out on an entirely voluntary and unpaid basis, allowing the setting up and expansion of projects in India and Nepal. Given these clear priorities, Usthi chose a pragmatic approach. Documentation of the results is intended to improve Usthi's work and provide accountability to donors. Within this framework, information on the concrete implementation of projects was collected and analysed in regular discussions with project partners, on-site visits and financial checks. From the very beginning, Usthi placed great importance on financial reporting to demonstrate the economical utilisation of donations. Furthermore, the development of the projects has always been documented in annual reports and, from time to time, in bulletins. Over the past 50 years, knowledge of how to measure results in the field of international co-operation has evolved significantly. Today, the sector's scientific models also shape Usthi's methods in measuring impact. The status and progress of ongoing projects are regularly discussed with the involved partners and local stakeholders. Annually, Usthi reflects on project progress based on impact objectives and renders a candid report. Where deemed useful, Usthi engages external experts for project evaluations, most recently in 2024, for an interim assessment of the education project in Dhading, Nepal and in 2025 for a comprehensive evaluation of health projects in the region around Somagiri, India.

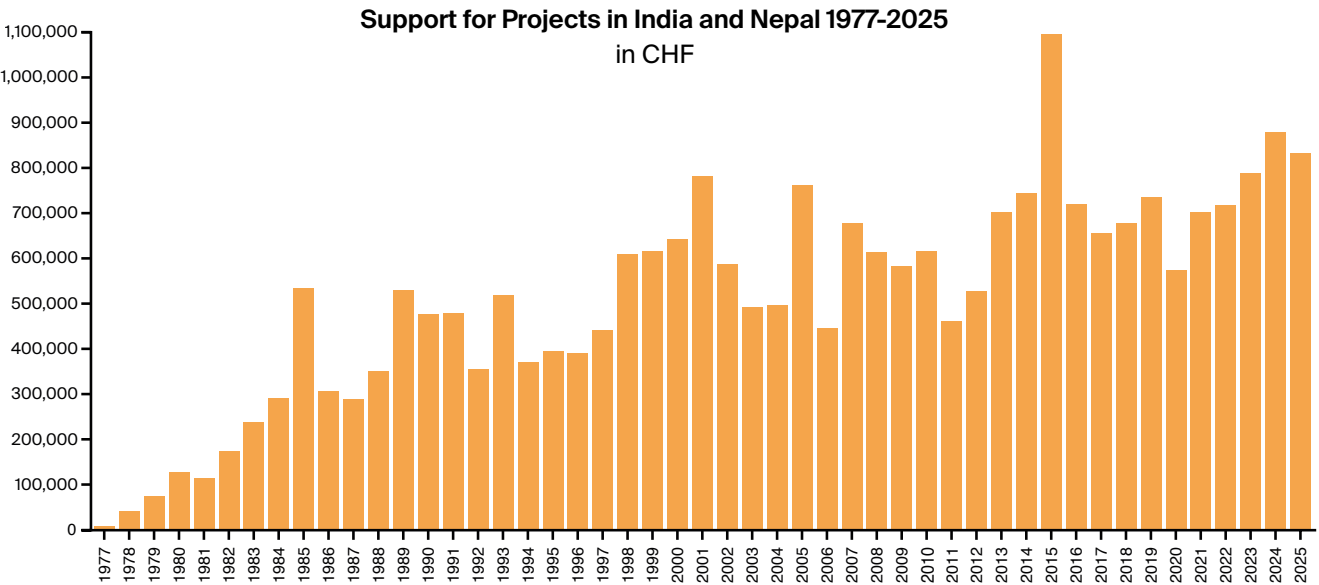
Usthi and project partners continually work to improve the accurate and coherent collection of data on services provided and people impacted. The guiding principle, which has accompanied Usthi from the beginning, remains: collection and documentation should always serve to improve projects for the long term and must not become ends in themselves.

What has been achieved?

Usthi has regularly documented in annual reports with statistics – although not using a fully coherent methodology – the benefits of the projects (education, medical care, protection and empowerment) for children and young adults from families in poverty. In order to convey the benefits and progress of Usthi's work in this 50th anniversary publication quantitatively, 10-year cross-sections within the three focus areas have been collated and are presented below. In addition, selected examples show how the projects have influenced living conditions of children and young adults.

Guidance on the Development of Financial Support

- 1977-1984** – Construction and start-up of the Bhor-e-Phool School
- 1985** – Land purchase for Ananda School; operations restart at the Tribal Health Centre; emergency relief after cyclone in West Bengal
- 1989-1990** – Construction of a commercial property for the social trading company in Kolkata
- 1991** – Construction of the Penthakata School
- 1993** – Start-up of the Penthakata School; building purchased for the Bangur Children's Home
- 1998-2001** – Construction and start-up of the Usthi Hospital in Bhubaneswar
- 2005** – Emergency relief in Tamil Nadu after Indian Ocean tsunami
- 2006** – Suspension of cooperation with Usthi Foundation India
- 2007-2014** – Expansion of projects in Hyderabad
- 2015** – Emergency relief in Nepal after earthquake
- 2020-2021** – COVID-19 pandemic: emergency relief and reduced project activity
- 2023-2024** – Renovation of fresh water supply and toilets at Ananda School by the Geberit company



Further insights into the impact of the projects have been provided in contributions from three project partners ¶6.1 and from three former pupils of Usthi schools ¶6.2.



Education

The education of children from kindergarten up to school leaving certificate in Grade 10, has always been the core issue concerning Usthi. The following figures are an impressive demonstration of this focus, which was further developed through the growing trust of donors. With the establishment of the work-related skills training centre in Hyderabad in 2008, Usthi expanded the scope of its educational support. Today, Usthi operates along the full educational pathway, from early childhood up to entry into working life.

In addition to basic competence in reading, writing and arithmetic, children acquire important social skills during their schooling, come to grips with values, practice critical thinking and develop presentation skills – all essential prerequisites for active participation in society and shaping their own futures. English lessons and using English as the tuition language, provide an important foundation for the future, as English skills are highly sought after in the job market.

Impact example: Sundari was able to resume her schooling

As a young girl, Sundari* lost her father due to illness. After his death, the family fell into financial difficulties and it was no longer possible for her single mother to pay Sundari's school fees. An acquaintance made the family aware of Usthi's Back-to-School Project. Thanks to this financial support, Sundari was able to return to school after a few months.

She struggled, however, to keep up with her lessons, particularly in mathematics. With the help of a tutor, Sundari was able to close the gaps in her learning. Today, this diligent student earns top marks in maths and is preparing for her school leaving certificate exams.

* The name has been changed to protect privacy.



Health

Health care has always been an important factor in the impact of Usthi's educational projects, as offered in the Bhor-e-Phool, Ananda, Penthakata and Dhading schools. A child in the education program, therefore, also benefits from health services within the educational setting.

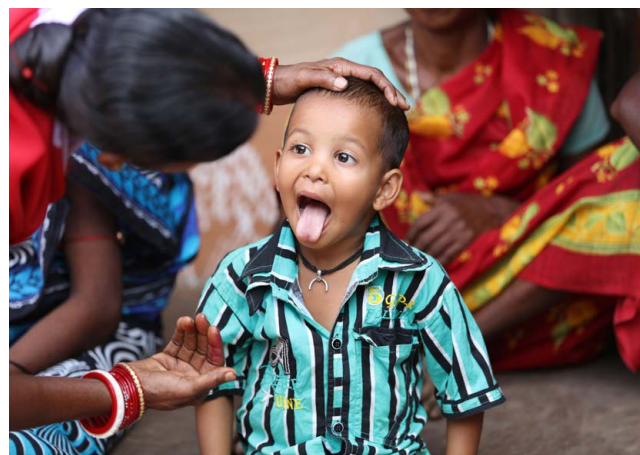
Early involvement in a specialised health facility was the support of the Tribal Health Centre in Somagiri, which, thanks to Usthi, was reopened in 1984, gradually expanded and supplemented with a network of community health workers in, now, 36 villages ¶2.2.1. The visible effect of this involvement is reflected in the tens of thousands of medical consultations provided in the surrounding villages, to people seeking help. Even though the improvement in the health of the region cannot be measured precisely, Usthi's long-term positive impact on the state of health of the rural population served, can easily be perceived.

Additional benefits can be discerned from training and further education of women from the Somagiri region, as community health workers. As they themselves report, their newly acquired skills help strengthen their position, as women, in society. Furthermore, basic knowledge about health remains embedded in the region for the long-term.

A similar effect was achieved through the intermittent support of the urban children's hospital and local health workers in the Dakshindari Slum in Kolkata from 1996 to 2006 ¶2.2.2. The Health and Education Project (HEP) for young children in the Somagiri area helps pre-schoolers to develop appropriate to their age, allowing them to grow up healthy and take up a place in local schools. This project contributes to reducing child mortality, illiteracy, malnutrition and supports early childhood development in the region. An independent evaluation in 2014 confirmed that the project operates effectively in accordance with its set objectives, thanks to the training of local women as social workers and their close association with public structures for support of early childhood development.



Students of the Penthakata School, 2022



Health check in Somagiri near Keonjhar, 2022

Impact example: Sabitri improves healthcare in her village

Sabitri* lives in a remote region in the Keonjhar district, India. In her village, Kantapada, she has served as a community health worker for 15 years. Her knowledge of hygiene and health enables her to advise and treat the people in the village. Every day, she meets with pregnant women, breast-feeding mothers, seniors and children to check on their well-being. In cases of serious illness or emergencies, she accompanies patients to the hospital.

What she values most about her work is that she can provide support to the people in the village, early enough to prevent avoidable deaths from malaria, typhoid, or diarrhoea. Her role has also changed her personal situation. She now enjoys more recognition and respect, as a woman, from her family and the community, thanks to her responsible work.

* The name has been changed to protect privacy.



Protection & Empowerment

The impact of Usthi is particularly clearly visible in the example of the girls who have lived in a residential group home in Kolkata, later called

Bangur Home. Here, street children, orphans and orphans who have only one living parent, girls from very low-income families, as well as those homeless after release from prison, have all found protection in a large family environment and received support for their education ↗2.3.1. Most of the girls have grown into independent adults. They have established themselves as workers in the labour market and have started their own families.

In the children's and women's homes in Hyderabad, one can easily see the long-term effect of a safe and supportive environment on the well-being of children and women. This can be observed in their personal development during their participation in the projects. Occasional reports from former residents, which clearly demonstrate the lasting impact of the support, are particularly encouraging. Access to education enables the children and women to shape their future independently after leaving the project environment.

Impact example: Parvati found protection and future prospects at the women's home

At the age of 13, Parvati* was forced into prostitution by her parents-in-law. For years, the girl found no help in her surroundings and saw no way out, until she learned about the awareness campaign run by the women's homes in Hyderabad. When she arrived at the women's homes, Parvati was closely supported by the professional project team. During her nine months in the project, she completed work-related skills training in beauty-care, tailoring and English. During this time, her son was able to stay at the children's home on the same campus and is now attending school. After completing her work-training, the young woman found employment and was able to build up independent income.

* The name has been changed to protect privacy.



Residential community of a children's home in Hyderabad, 2022

To strengthen local structures, Usthi today is investing in the management, project coordination and administration of its partner organisations.

Previously, Usthi has also worked with partners who were able, autonomously, to cover the costs of their organisational management, project coordination and administration.

Social enterprises

Usthi's selective investments in social enterprises ↗3 have a wide-ranging and profound impact. In addition to their previously mentioned local subsidisation of social projects, social enterprises provide fair working conditions and create jobs for people who would otherwise have difficulty entering the labour market. The textile processing enterprise in Hyderabad, for example, employs single mothers and supports them so that their children can attend school.

Another aspect is Usthi's participation in the health sector through the Usthi Hospital. The hospital offers a wide range of medical services: it provides, inter alia, regular antenatal check-ups for pregnant women, assists with countless births each year, performs surgical procedures and is equipped for medical emergencies. It regularly holds "Health Camps" for the community and health education is provided to the pupils at the Penthakata School.

Project coordination and administration

In addition to focusing on impact in the three core areas, Usthi also supports partner organisations so they can broaden their skill-base. Targeted and efficient implementation of the projects requires competent and committed management, both within the local organisations and the projects themselves.

	Children and youth	local staff	Children and youth	local staff	Children and youth	local staff	Children and youth	local staff	Children and youth	local staff
Education	1984		1994		2004		2014		2024	
Bhor-e-Phool School, Usthi	325	50	300	24	289	27				
Ananda School, Hudarait			150	30	198	29	242	29	246	23
Penthakata School, Puri			240	27	227	44	423	37	377	33
Shangri-La Orphans Job Integration, Kathmandu					5	3	25	3		
Kolar School, Bengaluru							557	24		
Thaddeus School, Bhastara							202	16	224	21
Back-to-School, Hyderabad							52	0.5	250	1
Tutoring, Hyderabad							174	0.5	375	15
Work-Related Skills Training, Hyderabad*							377	10	1,301	20
Empowering Children and Families, Dhading									2,839	3
	325	50	690	81	719	103	2,052	120	5,612	114
*youth and young adults			beds / consultations	local staff	beds / consultations	local staff	beds / consultations / children	local staff	beds / consultations / children	local staff
Health	1984		1994		2004		2014		2024	
Tribal Health Centre and Health Network, Somagiri			12 / 24,000	54	12 / 26,000	54	12 / 28,000	60	12 / 27,000	68
Health and Education Project, Somagiri							150	6	257	12
Dakshindari Children Hospital and Health Workers, Kolkata					30 / 16,000	48				
	0	0		54		102	150	66	257	80
			children	local staff	children	local staff	children / women / people reached	local staff	children / women / people reached	local staff
Protection & Empowerment	1984		1994		2004		2014		2024	
Bangur Children's Home, Kolkata			30	13	26	16	7	1		
Children's Homes, Hyderabad							40	8	62	13
Women's Homes, Hyderabad*							30	6	98	11
Awareness Campaign, Hyderabad							3,000	1	13,500	3
	0	0	30	13	26	16	3,077	16	13,660	27
*young adults										

Project coordination and administration at the partner organisations		local staff		local staff		local staff		local staff		local staff
	1984		1994		2004		2014		2024	
Kolkata		3		6		5		5		5
Somagiri						1		4		3
Bhubaneswar								2		2
Hyderabad								3		3
Dhading										1
		3		6		6		14		14
Social enterprises		local staff		local staff	beds	local staff	beds	local staff	beds	local staff
	1984		1994		2004		2014		2024	
Trading Enterprise, Kolkata		6								
Usthi Hospital, Bhubaneswar					15	28	40	120	40	100
Garment Factory, Hyderabad								30		30
		6		0		28		150		130

The summary of the number of children and young people helped in the focus areas of Education, Health and Protection & Empowerment, as well as local employees, impressively demonstrates the positive rise in Usthi's impact over the past 50 years.

Total	1984		1994		2004		2014		2024	
Children, youth and young adults	325		720		745		2,249		5,931	
Local staff		59		154		255		366		367

Important Voices on Usthi in India and Nepal

6

6.1

Project Partners

Ratan Barik

General Secretary Usthi Foundation India,
Bhubaneswar, India

Guided by trust on a successful path



I was born in 1970 in a remote village in the Medinipur district of West Bengal, India. My early life was marked by daily hardships and limited access to education. As a teenager, I moved to Kolkata in search of work and opportunities to pursue my higher education in order to support my family.

My career took a significant turn when I met the then secretary of Usthi Founda-

tion India. He gave me the opportunity to initiate the development of library, a computer centre, and a coaching facility in my hometown.

My most significant transformation began, when Mr. Kurt Bürki, the founder of Usthi Foundation, appointed me as the manager of the Usthi Hospital. Under Usthi's leadership, support, and belief in my potential, I was eventually able to transform the struggling Usthi Hospital into a fully functional and profitable medical facility. Usthi's consistent trust gave me the strength to face and overcome numerous challenges along the way.

From 2004 to 2008, I was increasingly entrusted with the leadership of Usthi Foundation India. I took over the responsibility for more than 650 children in three Usthi schools and the hospital in Bhubaneswar. Later I started engaging in the Tribal Health Centre serving the indigenous communities of Odisha. Many remarkable changes in my life have

come as a result of Mr. Bürki's unwavering belief in my potential. The way he continually challenged me, helped me grow both personally and professionally.

Usthi Foundation India has been recognized for its impactful work in healthcare, education, and social development. Usthi India was honoured with awards from Odisha Digital Media Association, Odisha Tele Viewers Pvt. Ltd, and further organisations.

I've achieved success in my life because Usthi always treated me as an equal partner. Our collaboration has been built on mutual recognition, respect, and trust – values that I believe are essential for true success and sustainable impact. Usthi has become much more than just an organisation to me – it is a significant part of my life. I can proudly say that Usthi is not just a place where I work, it is my family.

I am married to a supportive wife from Kolkata. We are proud parents to two children.

Today, as Secretary General of Usthi Foundation India, I have earned respect in society and am recognized as expert in the education and health sectors. My journey from a modest village background to becoming a successful leader of Usthi India and a dedicated social worker has been nothing short of a blessing.

Saji und Cynthia John

Co-Founders Asha Jyothi Foundation,
Hyderabad, India

From a vision to a growing social organisation

It was towards the end of 2006 when Kurt Bürki walked into my office in Hyderabad, India, introduced by a mutual friend. As we began talking, I shared with him a part of my story – how I had been educated by a Swedish NGO, and how I now dreamed of starting a small children's home. I wanted to support children from underprivileged families, just as I had once been supported.

At the end of our 30-minute conversation, Kurt asked me a simple question: "Would you be open for me participate with you in this vision?" That moment marked the beginning of a journey that neither of us could have fully imagined.



In June 2007, my wife Cynthia and I made the bold decision to leave our secure and well-paying jobs. We had no guarantees – only a desire to help. Everything started with two children who had been found abandoned on the streets of Hyderabad. An NGO worker brought them to our home, and we knew, this was our purpose. By the end of that year, we had welcomed 16 children into our first children's home.

From that small beginning, the vision began to grow. Today we operate with Usthi and with our own Indian foundation 38 children's homes, and another 40 homes are being built in our third campus.

Kurt became a very close friend to me and my wife Cynthia. We would often sit together and exchange ideas on how best we could help and empower vulnerable children and women. Soon we started another project called "Back-To-School Project" for children of single moms who were dropping out of school as the small family budget was not sufficient to pay their school fees. We began helping the families with the school fees so that the children could continue their studies. Soon we realized that this alone is not a sustainable solution. What began as school fee support led to the creation of our skill training institutes, where women and youth are equipped with tools to build sustainable futures.

Our partnership with Usthi has been more than financial support – it has been a shared vision, mutual encouragement, and a true friendship. Usthi became not just a partner, but a close circle of friends to both me and Cynthia.

What began as a dream to help 16 children has grown into a movement that is transforming thousands of lives across India. We are deeply grateful to Kurt, the Usthi Board and team, and all those who encourage us, support us, and belief in this mission.

We look forward – with faith and anticipation – to what lies ahead. Together, we believe we can do even more to bring hope, dignity, and opportunity to those who need it most.

Bishnu Bahadur Khatri

Chairperson Unnati, Kathmandu, Nepal

Lighting the collective path

Our partnership with Usthi Foundation was not formed out of chance but from shared values and a deep commitment to equity and child wellbeing.

The team of our NGO met Usthi's founder Kurt Bürki and the Usthi team in 2016 in Kathmandu for learning and sharing. That meeting marked the beginning of a strong and heartfelt relationship. Usthi's belief in children's education,

health, and wellbeing, as well as the compassion for underprivileged communities inspired us to walk this journey together. Together, we co-designed the Child Education and Empowerment Project (CEEP) in 2019, improving education access, upgrading school environments, and supporting families for skill development and income-generating activities.

Today we work with 15 schools, support 151 children with sponsorships, empower 22 blind and visually impaired students, and have already reached over 100 families with livelihood support and skill-based training. We're especially proud to share that 29 children supported through CEEP have already passed the Secondary Education Examination. This is not just a number – it is a sign of dreams coming true.

Through these initiatives, we contribute to localize the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in Nepal. Our integrated working approach is proof that global goals can be turned into real actions at the local level.

Our partnership with Usthi is rooted in deep respect and a shared vision. We have become true allies – growing, learning, and walking alongside the communities we serve. This journey has shown us that development is not charity – it is collaboration, equality, justice, and a firm belief that every child, regardless of background or ability, deserves the chance to learn, grow, and thrive.

As Usthi Foundation marks its 50th anniversary, we celebrate this journey of trust and shared purpose. We've planted seeds of hope together in Nepal – and they're blooming. With continued collaboration, we know we will reach even greater heights.



Beneficiaries

Saromita Majumdar

Former Bangur Home Resident

Building self-confidence through care and belonging



I would like to share my heartfelt gratitude and reflections on my journey with Usthi and the Bangur Home. I was raised by my single mother. During difficult times, she learned about the support offered by Usthi. It was through her trust and belief in a better future for me that I first came into contact with the Bangur Home in Kolkata.

My years there shaped me deeply. The Bangur Home was more than a shelter – it was a place of growth, discipline, and encouragement. I fondly remember the care and guidance of the staff, who created an environment where I could dream beyond my circumstances. Today I work at a health insurance company as Senior Brand Manager.

The friendships I made, the opportunities to study, and the sense of belonging are highlights that I will carry with me forever. At the same time, learning to live away from my mother at a young age was a challenge – yet it was this that taught me resilience and independence.

Even today, the values and lessons from the Bangur Home continue to guide me. My confidence, ability to face challenges, and belief in education as a tool for empowerment are gifts I owe to my time there.

Peu Pramanik

Ananda School Alumni

Realising dreams despite adversity

I am truly touched that, amongst many others, you have chosen me to write about the Usthi Foundation's 50th anniversary. Firstly, I would like to mention that I come from a very humble and poor family. At the age of four, I was admitted to Ananda School in Hudaib by my parents. There, I experienced what true education means.

From our teachers, I received continuous inspiration and learnt the concept of discipline and was given a vision of what it means to grow up. Today, I am employed. Above all, it was the support from Usthi that made it possible for me to establish myself in society and make a name for myself.



The Ananda School taught me how to overcome adversity and move forward in life. Alongside my education, dance became my passion, which Usthi opened the door to for me. However, I am still an apprentice in classical dance and have a journey ahead to master it.

Considering all aspects, I can say that the Ananda School and the support from Usthi are like a large tree to me, under

whose shade many like me have been able to realize their dreams. Usthi has made it possible for me to dream of moving forward, overcoming each milestone along the way. I am proud of Usthi and grateful to be a student of this foundation.

Samuel Mailipilli

Penthakata School Alumni

Discipline as a school of life



Thank you for the opportunity to write about my experiences in the Penthakata School.

I come from a humble fisherman's family and grew up in Penthakata. We were very poor, so as a child I would regularly search the beach at Penthakata for something to eat. When the Penthakata School opened, I was among its first pupils. At first, I came to school only for the

warm lunch. But what I received alongside it was a good education, discipline, good manners, and valuable life skills.

I am extremely proud to have been a student of Penthakata School. I loved the school buildings and the playground. All our teachers were kind-hearted and always ready to help us. This school has been the best part of my life.

Between the ages of 10 and 15, I learned many important lessons that shaped my future. The skills and motivation I gained at Usthi gave me the confidence to become a businessman. Today, I am the owner of three men's clothing shops.

I am truly happy and give full credit for my success to the Penthakata School. And it's not just me – thousands of children have studied at Usthi and benefited from it. Even today, I often think of the many beautiful memories with my school friends. Mr. Bürki was, and will always be, the guiding light of the Penthakata School – a true blessing to all of us.

Swiss Embassy

Maya Tissafi

Maya Tissafi, Swiss Ambassador to India and Bhutan

Half a century of Usthi



For five decades, Usthi has been working to help disadvantaged people in India, focusing especially on children and young people. This anniversary is a testament to Usthi's successful and innovative approach, as well as to its close partnerships with local organisations. Good local knowledge and strong local co-operation are indispensable for sustainable work in marginalised communities.

In India in particular, it becomes clear how important working together with local partner organisations is. Only those who understand the social, cultural and economic conditions on the ground can initiate sustainable change.

Thanks to Usthi, many young people have been and continue to be given prospects for their future. Usthi's approach, which empowers people to take responsibility for themselves, significantly contributes to their human dignity. The Swiss network in India, consisting of the embassy, consulates general and honorary consuls, follows a similarly partnership-orientated approach. With the new Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) between the EFTA states and India, Switzerland has committed to creating jobs in India together with other EFTA countries and to promoting innovation. In line with the key areas of education, health and protection & empowerment, Usthi is also engaged in work-related skills training. Young people gain not only practical skills but also self-confidence and a chance for an independent life. Entire families are thereby strengthened and the vicious circle of poverty can be broken. For bilateral relations, civil society and individual exchanges are essential. Organisations like Usthi can make a decisive contribution by supporting or complementing state structures. In doing so, Usthi opens up new opportunities for the future.

The Swiss Embassy in New Delhi congratulates Usthi on this milestone 50th anniversary and wishes all the very best for the future.

Important Voices on Usthi in Switzerland

7

7.1

Institutional Donors

Albert Baehny

Chairman of the Board, Geberit

**Creating opportunities together –
a commitment that connects people**

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Geberit Group, I warmly congratulate the Usthi Foundation on its 50th anniversary. Since its founding, Usthi has been working to give children and young people in India and Nepal access to education, health and protection. We hold the highest respect for this commitment.

Our connection to Usthi goes back to 2010, with the first joint project at the Penthakata School in Odisha. At that time, Geberit apprentices installed new sanitary facilities on site. In 2023, eleven apprentices again travelled to India, to the Ananda School in Hudarait, to build modern sanitary infrastructure together with local partners. This effort was not only technically but also personally enriching – true co-operation characterised by sharing ideas and solidarity.

"What our apprentices brought back from India is more than just experience – it is understanding, responsibility, and the will to make a difference".



For Geberit, sustainability is part of our DNA – and education is a central concern. We deliberately invest in the training of young people and make a concrete contribution to better living conditions through projects such as that with Usthi. Our apprentices also learn a great deal – about different realities, responsibility – and the power of collective commitment.

Working with the Usthi Foundation is, therefore, far more than a social project. It stands for the conviction that we are part of a global community – a community which can develop best through openly sharing ideas and mutual respect. We thank the entire Usthi team for this inspiring partnership. Our special thanks go to the foundation's founder, Kurt Bürki, for his visionary work over so many decades.

Town Council of Rapperswil-Jona

**A significant milestone to take pause and express
gratitude**

What began at the end of 1977 with a small mud hut as the first school in an Indian village, has grown over decades into a vital institution, tirelessly promoting education, health and protection for young people in India and Nepal. The core principles of Usthi have continually been maintained: equal opportunities, respect and sustainability.

Over all these years, we have been able to help Usthi's development and support it with financial contributions. We are filled with respect and pride that Usthi, today, benefits annually over 46,000 people in need through 13 projects – children's homes are providing protection, work-related skills are being taught and basic medical care is being ensured in remote regions.



The foundation stands on a solid footing – politically independent, denominationally neutral and certified by the Zewo seal of approval.

We look confidently into the future. May Usthi continue to empower innumerable children and young people in India and Nepal, ensure access to health services and provide refuges. Our town will continue to be a reliable partner – with appreciation, practical commitment and solidarity.

On its 50th birthday, we wish the Usthi Foundation all the best, much strength and many more inspiring stories of co-operation across all borders.

For the Swissair Staff Foundation for Children in Need:

Gusti Bader

Honorary President

Robert Amgwerd

President

Marcel Hungerbühler

Former President

Bruno Stefani

Member of the Board of Trustees and
Usthi Contact Person

**A commitment to solidarity, confidence and
kind-heartedness**

Edeltrud and Kurt Bürki started in 1976 during their first trip to Kolkata by financing a street kitchen. Over fifty years, this commitment has grown into a respected, objective-driven and considerate aid organisation with a focus on education and health in India and Nepal. The courage of those early days and the enormous enthusiasm of Edeltrud and Kurt Bürki have achieved extraordinary results and enabled many people from the poorest social strata to live dignified and self-determined lives. Usthi is an impressive testament to what can be achieved with a strong will, confidence and kind-heartedness.

For the Swissair Staff Foundation for Children in Need, it was natural to support one of its employees' projects. Kurt Bürki spent his entire professional career at Swissair, ending his career as a Boeing 747 captain. The partnership with Usthi began in 1981 and continues to this day. Although the two children's foundations were occasionally confused in the minds of Swissair staff, there was never any sense of competition. On the contrary, it was an honour for our Swissair Staff Foundation for Children in Need to support Usthi Foundation in difficult times with additional contributions. According to our statutes, our support has to focus on Usthi's priority of "Education", in particular on financing the Penthakata School in the state of Odisha.

Our former president, Marcel Hungerbühler with his wife Ellen supported Usthi on the ground in India. During his



STIFTUNG KINDERHILFE DES SWISSAIR PERSONALS

FONDATION DU PERSONNEL SWISSAIR
POUR L'AIDE AUX ENFANTS

SWISSAIR STAFF FOUNDATION
FOR CHILDREN IN NEED

time in India, Marcel helped three young women from Usthi's Bangur Home in Kolkata – Santana, Guddi and Priti – to join the labour market by arranging employment for them at the airports in Bangalore and Delhi. Ellen assisted them in finding and furnishing an apartment in Delhi.

We wish the entire Usthi team continuing success in their admirable undertaking. In the future, Usthi can continue to count on the support of the Swissair Staff Foundation for Children in Need.

Private Supporters

Annemarie Steiner

How the Usthi spark spread



I think it was in the mid or late 1970s when Kurt Bürki – our flight captain – spoke at a dinner, during a Swissair rotation, with great enthusiasm about his charitable project in India. Taking in street children, giving them a home, an education and a better future impressed me deeply. From that moment on, I admired Kurt Bürki and his wife and decided to support the project. For almost

50 years now, I have followed with interest the intermittent reports about the Usthi family and am always delighted by the personal stories from Kurt Bürki, about his travels and the families in India and Nepal.

The Usthi organisation has grown, changed and expanded over the years. I am still impressed how the donated money is used meaningfully and provides the poorest with a chance for a better future. I too, during my years at Swissair, was able to get to know and to love both countries, India and Nepal, on private trips.

Donatella Suter

With heart and soul in India

For 40 years, I have been a volunteer with the Usthi Foundation to promote social justice and less discrimination in India and Nepal. Today I am responsible for accounting and private donations management.

It all began in 1985 at a bank counter in Rapperswil. I met Kurt Bürki and he told me how the Usthi Foundation in India works against child trafficking and to further health, schooling and vocational training, particularly for disadvantaged children and young women. I decided on the spot to take over the Usthi Foundation's secretariat and thereby give something back from my own privileged life.

I have already been to India nine times and maintain close contact with the local project leaders. Visits to the projects are marked by warmth, joy for life and heart-warming encounters with pupils and teachers.

I feel especially close to the Bangur Girls, who grew up in our girls' home in Kolkata. During my visits, I was able to



spend a lot of time with them, we always had fun and a close bond was formed. Today, these Bangur Girls are long since grown women, strong and autonomous, with good jobs and/or their own families. Thanks to social media, I am often able to keep in touch with them and to see how they are doing.

I am convinced that our work there is sustainable and creates opportunities for young people in India and Nepal, giving them a chance for a dignified and self-determined life. Therefore, I am and will remain wholeheartedly dedicated to Usthi.

Alexandra Meyer-Känel

Support for Usthi spanning the generations

The name Usthi has been familiar to my husband and me, since our childhood. The little Usthi shop in the old town of Rapperswil was opposite my parents-in-law's cheese shop. My parents told us about a pilot who often travelled to India to help out there. When the clergyman asked us before our wedding what the collection should be used for, Usthi was the obvious choice – and we have stayed with it ever since. Why? Because we are aware that we had something others lacked – a safe parental home and access to education. Usthi addresses precisely those areas and it is gratifying to know that Usthi has changed countless lives for the better.

Every year, the Usthi Christmas card is displayed on our



Christmas sideboard, where our daughter sees it too. When she one day earns her own living, perhaps she will also think of Usthi. For now, however, it is simply: Happy Birthday, Usthi and heartfelt thanks to everyone who made Usthi possible and continues to work for it today.

Anna Hochuli

Stay curious and have the courage to get involved



I first came into contact with the Usthi Foundation during my school years. At the high school Realgymnasium (RG) Rämibühl in Zurich, it was the co-operation with Usthi, especially the partnership with the school in Penthakata, that motivated me to get involved in the RG Rämibühl solidarity group. In our working together with Usthi, I learned how a small idea can lead to some-

thing big – a cake sale at RG Rämibühl in Zurich made it possible to build an entire school kitchen in Penthakata.

After graduation, my connection with Usthi finally took me to India. I was able to visit the school in Penthakata, see the kitchen with my own eyes and enjoy the lunch prepared there. This experience was formative for me – it showed how people all over the world, despite their many differences, come together in communities and how uniting shared meals can be.

Talking to the Usthi Foundation also taught me how curiosity and joint involvement can make new ideas a reality. To realise something new, it takes courage and other people. The Usthi Foundation sets an example to all of us how continual small steps can lead to major changes and transform ideas into concrete projects. Usthi brings people together who are committed to a shared idea and create something new collectively. This curiosity and shared engagement accompany me to this day.

Thank you, Usthi – let's remain curious together and involve ourselves courageously for our ideas!

Kurt Bürki Foundation 7.3

Bernhard Locher

Chairman of the Board of the Kurt Bürki Foundation

Enabling sustainable impact over time



In 1995, a promising partnership developed between Kurt Bürki and Thomas Fischer, a finance and tax advisor from the canton of Schwyz. From their profound friendship, based on mutual respect, emerged Thomas Fischer's active social commitment to the values of the Usthi Foundation. His selfless and exemplary efforts were remarkable when he stepped in during

the Swissair bankruptcy – which had resulted in a 30% loss of donations for Usthi from former Swissair employees. By organising hundreds of pupil sponsorships, which allowed the education and healthcare of a socially disadvantaged child for one Swiss franc per day, Thomas Fischer compensated the financial loss caused by Swissair's collapse and secured Usthi's survival.

In 2022, he established the Kurt Bürki Foundation (KBS) and endowed it with a substantial capital. The KBS has the sole purpose of supporting the Usthi Foundation and will assist it in the expansion of its project portfolio or in emergency relief activities. The KBS aims to grow its assets through additional legacies, thereby securing Usthi's long-term impact. Sadly, Thomas Fischer passed away in September 2025. A friend and benefactor of the Usthi Foundation will be greatly missed.

The KBS was modelled on the **Edeltrud Bürki Foundation (EBS)**. In 1998, the Usthi Foundation had received two major legacies which formed the initial capital of the Edeltrud Bürki Foundation – established on 30th November 1998 in memory of the late founder of the Usthi Foundation. It too had the sole purpose of supporting the Usthi Foundation.

The EBS contributed to Usthi's projects and specifically financed the retirement fund for the local employees of Usthi Foundation India. After the local employees decided to join the Indian state pension fund, the EBS was dissolved in 2017, and the remaining foundation assets were made over to the Usthi Foundation. Over 20 years, the EBS contributed, in total, approximately 470,000 Swiss francs.

After 50 years of activity, it is the right moment to collate the conclusions the Usthi Foundation has drawn from its work – what it has learned from the past.

Six lessons for work in India and Nepal

1.

The countries are fascinating and the societies are complex, with histories and structures very different from our own. We must always keep this in mind and also the fact that the reverse is true for our partners in India and Nepal.

2.

"He who pays the piper calls the tune" is not our motto. It is not Usthi who allows its partner organisations to participate in the projects – rather, the reverse. Usthi accompanies its partner organisations, who are owners of the projects. This ownership and responsibility for project management is equivalent to the influence of Usthi's financing. Both sides inspire each other and learn from each other. This is the only way to allow co-operation on an equal footing, with respect and tolerance. Usthi has had positive experiences with this "balance of power".

3.

The content for the projects arises from the needs of the local people. The project partners best know the social and cultural conditions. It is they, therefore, who should determine the priorities and, in dialogue with Usthi, chart the path to meeting these needs. Experience has shown that this means building on what already exists and working with local organisations and authorities. Involving partners in all major decisions furthers their identifying with and loyalty to the Usthi movement and its projects.

4.

Strong and innovative people in the top management of the partner organisations greatly facilitate project work. A local concentration of power is therefore unavoidable. As in Swiss corporate culture, however, responsibility should be distributed, in a forward-looking manner, across several people – a challenging task given the highly hierarchical management tradition in India.

5.

The co-operation between Usthi and the partner organisations is built for the long term. Mutual trust is critical to the success of the projects. This trust should not be blind, but based on listening, openness and reciprocal respect. Constant dialogue between Usthi and the partner organisations strengthens local control mechanisms and joint reflection on problems improves projects to the benefit of the people affected. Mistakes cannot be avoided – but mutual trust allows them to be corrected together and lessons learned.

6.

Striving for the financial independence of partner organisations is a central goal of Usthi, but it is difficult to achieve. Financial contributions from those receiving services are severely limited, because Usthi focuses on supporting children and young people afflicted by poverty. The development of value-creating activities, with which the partners can subsidise social programs is, thus, very important. This usually requires large investment and carries significant financial risks, as these are activities exposed to local economic competition. Nonetheless: Without the partner organisations increasing profitable activities, reducing dependence on donations would remain an empty promise.

Seven lessons for work in Switzerland

1.

Usthi's positioning, based on the core values of "the partner organisations have pre-eminence" and "emphasis on the self-financing and value creation of the partner organisations", has also proven successful in the Swiss setting. These values are part of Usthi's DNA.

2.

Usthi should remain agile in its work and continually reflect on its practices. If the project context changes, Usthi must be able to adapt its objectives, substance and its own approach. If the conditions for a project fundamentally change, or if long-term co-operation with a partner organisation becomes unworkable, Usthi should withdraw from the endeavour – graciously and with regard for the people affected.

3.

Usthi can build trust in its work through open communication with donors and the public. This includes disclosing poor decisions which did not achieve the desired outcome. Society knows that we make mistakes and that we are not omniscient. Publicly acknowledging less than ideal decisions with the note, "We can do better", creates greater confidence in what we are doing.

4.

Organisationally, the clear delineation of responsibilities within the Usthi Foundation has proven effective -- the Management is responsible for project co-ordination in India and Nepal, as well as for fundraising and communication in Switzerland. The Board of Trustees monitors and supports the office, setting the strategic and financial framework.

5.

In the early decades – the pioneer phase – Usthi was strongly shaped by its founders and took some time transforming itself into a stable organisation, independent of the founding generation. Nearly twenty years after the professionalisation of the Usthi management, it now operates independently of the founder and is well-prepared for the future. The lesson here is that an organisation must work hard to consolidate and retain staff after a pioneer phase.

6.

This personnel and organisational transformation must also be reflected in the selection of new qualified leaders in Switzerland. The founders' commitment to alleviating discrimination and injustice with the greatest personal and financial dedication was able to be carried out without fixed working hours, because the foundation was interwoven with their own personal lives. Usthi was only able to survive three decades in this way without employees and purely as a family enterprise. Transferring this typical and necessary pioneer mindset to a professional operation cannot work out. Consolidation requires employees' commitment and motivation within normal working conditions. The challenge is not to find lone "workhorses", but a well harmonised team of strong personalities – and to retain them.

7.

From the pioneer phase, what should be carried over is what can be called the "Usthi culture" – personal commitment, willingness to innovate, respect for Indian and Nepali partner organisations and their representatives and humility in assessing one's own abilities.

Usthi in 10 Years Time

Felix Senn

President of the Usthi Board of Trustees

Alessandra Grosse

Executive Director of the Usthi Foundation

Even after another 10 years, Usthi will continue to work together with its local partners for better future prospects for socially and economically disadvantaged children and young adults in India and Nepal. The values and principles of Usthi, which have guided its work for 50 years, will continue to form a strong foundation for the efforts of everyone involved in Switzerland and in the projects.

The long-term goal remains unchanged – to design projects in such a way that they can, one day, operate durably and independent of Usthi. This means that, over time, Usthi's support will become superfluous. How can this goal be achieved?

The decisive factor remains the focus on education and health, as these are key to greater equality of opportunity and durable change. Access to education not only develops academic knowledge but also social skills, self-confidence and a sense of identity; basic health care along with preventative measures ensure healthy development.

Equally essential is creating better opportunities for young women and men so they can build a self-determined life in dignity, out of poverty. In 10 years, therefore, Usthi, together with local partners, will offer even more work-related training courses than today.

An important aspect of Usthi's involvement will not only remain working for children, young people and women from disadvantaged groups, but also working with them. Local communities know best their challenges and needs, but only



through working together on equal terms, can lasting and viable improvements be achieved. In the coming decade, Usthi will focus on strengthening co-operation with reliable local partners who are willing to take on responsibility and ensure long-term change.

We envisage Usthi in 2035 as an agile organisation, based on values, with a solid track record in international development co-operation. Clear structures and strategies have so far been the basis for action and will continue to be guidelines for the organisation in the years ahead. To remain successful, everyone involved must be willing to question these principles, test new approaches and be prepared to take the necessary decisions. The effects of Usthi's work must be continually monitored to identify shortcomings early and implement corrective measures in good time.

We are confident that Usthi is well-positioned to take important steps in the coming decade. Together with all stakeholders, we look forward to carrying forward the vision that has guided Usthi for 50 years, opening new opportunities for children and young adults in India and Nepal, into the future.



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- our employees

...who have built, supported, and carried forward the extraordinary work of Usthi over the past 50 years, helping create a better future for people in India and Nepal.



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