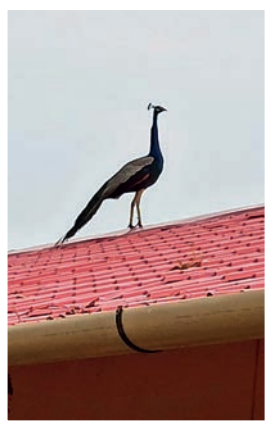




Eagerly waiting for this place to be occupied and filled with the laughter of the little children !



## ***We continue building the school !***

Our new kindergarten block in *St-Anthony's School, Dugawar* is ready to welcome students ! Classes

from Nursery to 1 will be moving here from the Primary school building. We hope that it will transform the lives of thousands of children. Thank you for helping us to make it happen. As a reminder, we decided the construction of this new building in the campus, because the Primary school building is totally full.

The foundation work and the first structure of the building was ready by the end of March and the remaining work was completed after the lockdown was eased, during the last three months. As mentioned earlier, the building with tin sheet roof reduced the construction cost. This type of buildings are common in South India, but not existing in North India. *Roy Mathews*, our director, who comes from the South has supervised and used his know-how in this building. The iron roofing work was given to the welder in the village of *Asmoli* and the work was closely supervised. The furniture for the children were made out of the old window pans of our main building which had lost their colours. *Roy Mathews* has transformed



The building is a replica of primary schools of south of India. Usually not visible in the north.



our school campus with creativity and he is expert in making use of the waste materials from the campus. More about it later.





Since the school was closed, our local staff like gardeners, drivers etc. worked on the site.



Old fibre glass windows are transformed into tables for the new block.



## Breaking Gender Stereotype

When the lockdown began on 24 March, the migrated labours from cities returned home to their villages. Our project area also had many of them coming back. March-April being harvest season in the state of *Uttar Pradesh* most of them managed to get some work locally. However in a few weeks time harvest was over and they were left with no work. As weeks and months passed by, without a regular income, it became difficult to sustain their families. The government supported the poor with the essential commodities like grains, oil, etc. This partial support brought some relief. In our project area, *Self Help Groups* (SHG) members were helpful to those who were in a difficult situation. Those in need were given loans via the SHGs.

Our staff requested the *Block Development Officer* (BDO) to provide some work for our SHGs. One project available under the government program at that time was to make *Citizen's Information Board* (CIB). Those boards display the information about the projects implemented by the government in the locality such as road construction. Asmoli

block needed 700 of such boards. The BDO knows our organization well and was ready to propose this work to our SHGs.

It involved concreting, steel binding, painting, writing on the boards, and then finally dispatching them to their destination. In India, it is male dominated work. Women from the villages where caste system and caste based labour is prevalent, do not enter in this field. It was a challenge for our women to break this caste based labour and the gender stereotype. But they did it !

We proposed the work to our SHGs from the villages of *Dugawar* and *Rahrai*. Initially they were scared on the practical aspect, but with the support from their families they decided to take up this project. As they learned the skill, the initial fear gave way to confidence and self-worth. After finishing their household works, they were gathering and starting to work together on the project. In the beginning, the village community looked up on them with disapproval. The group was very strong and ignored this disapproval. Few years ago, they could never think of taking up a work like this, things have changed a lot.





Women were happy to learn new skills.  
« We are so confident now, feel great sense of self-worth. »



The government officials who came to inspect the work were surprised to see the way the group was organized.

The work was given on a contract basis, Rs.4500 /slab at its completion. The group was responsible to buy the materials and to complete the work. Cement curing, painting and writing require more time. One month's time is required to complete one slab. Most of the work except writing on the board and dropping the board on its destination was done by the group. A skilled person was hired to write on the board at the rate of Rs.350/slab. The first order for the 50 slabs was done in the month of September and in one month's time they finished it. Finished slabs are dispatched to different sites as per the request of the BDO. Now they started doing their second order. Each member could gain approximately Rs.7000 from this work in a month.

## Schools reopening

Though the central government gave permission to reopen schools for students from grades 9 to 12 from the month of October, each State government had to decide as per the pandemic situation. Peak of Corona was in mid September, but some states are still struggling to curb the virus.

In Uttar Pradesh, where we have our St-Anthony's Schools, the reopening was decided on 19 October for children from classes 9 to 12 on a voluntary basis only. Written consent from the parents was required for each child and safety measures were strictly to be



implemented. Before the reopening, inspectors came to check if the school was ready. Many schools had to wait a longer period to get permissions from the authorities. The St.Anthony's Shool in Dugawar started classes for 9 to 12 on October 19. Teachers from the





Classes from 9 to 12 restarted in St-Anthony's School Dugawar.

locality, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are back in the campus. Transportation facility (busses) has not resumed yet : students have to reach on their own. Campus accommodation is proposed to those who face transportation difficulties. Unfortunately, children from classes up to 8 are only allowed to have online classes. Our local teachers continue however to do the class here and there in the villages.

### « Your help will make my future bright »

« Ma'am, I need your help », a message from personal chat window of Microsoft Teams popped up on my computer window in October. It was 8:00 pm our time and in India it was already 11:30 pm. All the students have access to me via the online class Teams application but not many dare to initiate a direct chat. It was one of our class 7 students, from the St-Anthony's school of Dugawar. His father fell seriously ill, he was afraid that his father won't be able to get back to work. He was also afraid that he will have to stop his studies and take care of his mother and two sisters. He wrote to me : « Your little help will make my future bright. Please help me. » Along with, he sent me a picture of his mud house, to convince me that they don't even have a proper house. Usually girls are supported by

us, but when we come across genuine cases, we take care of boys as well. It is just one of the many stories we come across.

The pandemic has taken a devastating toll on hundreds of millions of people across the globe. People are in distress and future seems bleak for a bigger part of the humanity. A lot of people cry out for help. Each little act of love brings a ray of hope to the broken hearts.

Christmas reminds us of God's love for the humanity. God continues to manifest His love in a unique way through each of our act of kindness, just like this little boy.

Thank you for making the future of many lives bright ! Along with each of them wish you God's choicest blessings in the years to come ! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2021 !

Molly Sebastian,  
project coordinator



He understood that without proper education, he will have no chance to transform this mud house.

The evolution of the coronavirus epidemic in India is not similar to what we see in Belgium. No second wave, but after a decrease in cases, the curve tends to flatten. Here too, only the arrival of a vaccine will make it possible to return to a more normal life.

