

Teacher Unions and Global Schoolroom work together for Quality Education



The ASTI INTO and TUI have for many years supported the work of Global Schoolroom, the teacher education organisation who currently work with teachers and school leaders in India, Sierra Leone and Ghana.

In addition to involving over 250 Irish teachers as volunteer tutors, this valuable support has created a strong fraternal bond between the Irish teacher union movement and a tribal teacher union in the state of Meghalaya in Northeast India, the Khasi Jaintia Deficit Schools Teachers' Association (KJDSTA). This began as far back as 2009, when former (and very brave) past presidents Jim Higgins (INTO) and Joe Moran (ASTI) accepted an invitation from Global Schoolroom to travel with them to some of the remotest parts of Northeast India to visit the schools and teachers that Global Schoolroom were working with.

The following year, Presidents Jack Keane (ASTI) and Noreen Flynn (INTO) took up the invitation and brought back even more stories from the 'abode of the clouds' the Sanskrit name used locally for the area - believed by many to be the wettest place in the world.

A visit from Joycelyn Kharumnuid (KJDSTA) along with three other India teachers to Ireland in April 2011, for additional training with Global Schoolroom and UCD, resulted in her gratefully accepting an invitation from Noreen, Jack and Peter MacMenamin (TUI) to speak at all three teacher union conferences that Easter. This consolidated the relationship between the Irish and Indian partners and the traffic between remote Northeast India and Ireland increased - with Gerry Breslin (ASTI), John O'Brien (INTO) and Alison Gilliland (INTO) appearing in the *Shillong Times* alongside their KJDSTA colleagues, as they facilitated a joint workshop on union structures in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya in 2012.

By 2013 Presidents Sally Maguire (ASTI), Brendan O'Sullivan (INTO) and Gerry Craughwell (TUI) extended an invitation to a KJDSTA delegation, lead by then President Everard Nongsiang to the Easter conferences, where those attending were wowed by Everard as he spoke passionately on the scale of challenges facing teachers in that remote corner of Northeast India - including being regularly left unpaid for up to six months at a time due to state bureaucracy. A speech by Gerry Craughwell in the presence of then Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn, bolstered the resolve of the delegation. Returning to India they ramped up the level of discussions with the state government of Meghalaya and presented a letter of support from all three Irish teacher unions. Street protests and rallies followed, during which the letter from Ireland was regularly read out. The dispute was eventually resolved, the teachers now get paid on time and the KJDSTA acknowledge the support of the Irish unions in achieving this.

In 2015, Maire Ní Chiarba (ASTI), Emma Dineen (INTO) and Annette Dolan (TUI) were invited to attend a KJDSTA conference in Shillong. Responding to the need for greater "organisation" skills, the three wise women, lead by Emma, and with huge support from John O'Brien (INTO) set about developing a union support programme for the KJDSTA which would take place in Ireland in February 2016. One of the areas which really impressed the Indian delegation was the process developed by INTO learning to support member learning. And at a subsequent Global Schoolroom graduation event in Shillong in 2017 attended by John Boyle (INTO), Joanne Irwin (TUI), John O'Brien (INTO), Ciaran Griffin (TUI) and Carmel Hume (INTO) a plan was hatched.

This graduation brought the total number of teachers who completed the Global Schoolroom training to 700 and created a critical mass of KJDSTA members who could now take this learning forward. A team selected from the KJDSTA in collaboration with Global Schoolroom set about developing a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme for members of the association.

In 2018, all three Irish teacher unions pledged their support to funding this program to the tune of €30,000 per year for three years.

Much of the first year went in to planning both content and delivery and in selection of volunteers within the association who would be trained up by Global Schoolroom as trainers. Quite a few visits to India were required to meet with KJDSTA executives and members. Unfortunately, while India races ahead economically, this tribal region has been left somewhat behind so Skype is not really an option and face-to-face tends to work best.

Eventually, a workshop with 15 members of the by now established KJDSTA Education Team was facilitated by Global Schoolroom Programme Manager and INTO member Grainne Horan in Shillong on 4th and 5th of June, 2019. Since then, the four person core team (Joycelyn Kharumnuid; Jona Goswami; Reynold Bas-saiawmoit and Alienor Michelle Lyngwa) met on the 12th of August to draft a plan for 1-2 day pilot programmes in two zones: the Jowai Zone and the Nongstoin/Mawshynrut Zone - these represent two small clusters of schools and target approximately 30 teachers across the two zones. An initial meeting took place with these teachers on 11th of September and a workshop is scheduled for October. To further expand the project the core team are planning to organize CPD programmes in two to three other zones before the end of the year. The team also proposes to organize a week-long plenary workshop for all the participants of the CPD programmes along with the Global Schoolroom team early in 2020.

The KJDSTA and Global Schoolroom gratefully acknowledge the support of the INTO, ASTI and TIUI and look forward to 2020 with hope.

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