

SMILING GECKO REVIEW 2023



Smiling Gecko®
bridging needs

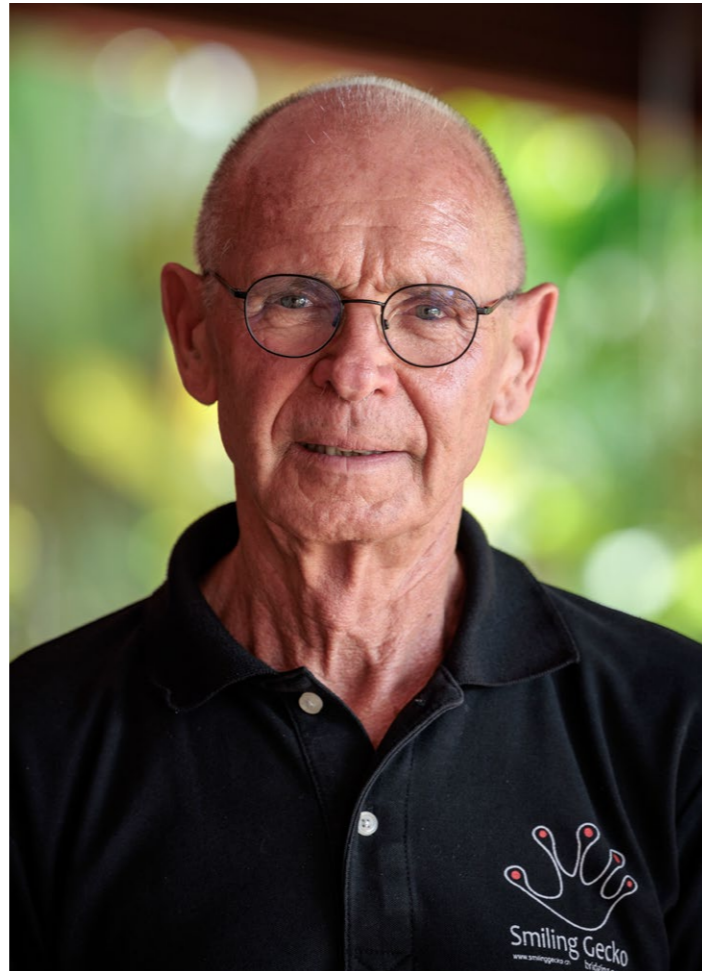


Dear friends of Smiling Gecko

In 2022, I spoke at this point about how extremely demanding the past twelve months had been. 365 days later, I should start this review with a similar statement. But couldn't I have done this every year anyway? We are in Cambodia and life here is demanding. This makes it all the more important to support the people here. To work with them to create ways out of misery. Because they exist. I remain convinced of that.

As you will see in this annual review, we continue to work hard on our vision of a better future for Cambodia. This is only possible because we have received the financial means from you. I would like to ask you to continue to support us in this way. Because there is one thing that has not changed in the last year: We are dependent on your help!

Sincerely,
Hannes Schmid



MY PERSONAL HIGHLIGHT OF THE YEAR

Anyone who lives on the Smiling Gecko Campus for more than half the year, like me, sees the continuous development of our children up close. Nevertheless, I was blown away when I heard for the first time the song that our school children had rehearsed in memory of their friend Raksmei, who was killed by lightning.

“See you again” is extremely demanding to sing. But our little musicians master even the most difficult rap passages in English with flying colors. During the video recordings I had goosebumps time and time again because I no longer just had children singing along to a text in front of the camera, but rather personalities who are confidently mastering their extremely difficult lives. They understand more and more what opportunities their good training will offer them. It’s an indescribable feeling.



Scan the QR code for the music video
or go to smilinggecko.ch/en/see-you-again/.



THE FIRST MONTHS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL



For the first time since our school was founded, we have a 7th grade this year and therefore the first year of the middle school. We are incredibly proud of these children. However, we are sad as we cannot offer them an adequate school building yet. Unfortunately, construction has been significantly delayed, not least due to the difficult weather conditions. We had a complete project stop on the construction sites of the middle school and the house of culture and music to first drive 128 massive supporting stakes into the ground. An unplanned but necessary measure to provide the foundations with the necessary stability after months of rain.



DIFFICULT CONDITIONS IN THE PROVISIONARY FACILITY

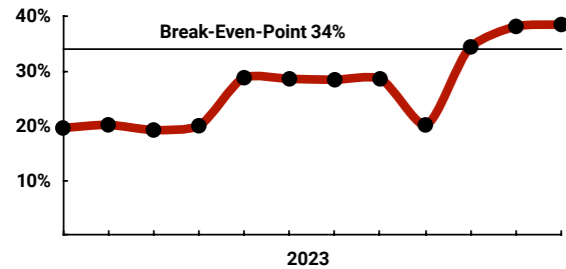
Until the middle school construction is finished, we have to teach in a temporary facility. Our children and teachers are brave, but the simple construction of bamboo, wood and corrugated metal offers anything but good conditions for long days in the classroom. For example, the internal temperature can quickly rise to over 30 degrees. Bitter, but unfortunately we don't have a better alternative at the moment.



THE FARMHOUSE IS IN THE BLACK FOR THE FIRST TIME

In 2019 we were already close. Then Corona came. Now the time has finally come: This winter, the Farmhouse Resort will cover its costs for the first time and will probably even contribute modestly to the financing of the Smiling Gecko Campus. In times when even the occupancy rate of the capital's hotels in Phnom Penh is just 20%, this is quite a success and gives hope for the future.

Our concept of "luxury for a good cause" with the corresponding investments in the comfort of the facility seem to be paying off. But it is also really a wonderful place, which has only become more attractive thanks to the opening of the fine dining restaurant "Un" in spring and the ever-increasing vegetation of the "Sanctuary Spa".



Our new website, which we finalized in the summer, should also make a significant contribution to the increasing success of the Farmhouse. Our website finally reflects the beauty of the place. If you want to take a look:

scan the QR code or go to farmhouse-smilinggecko.com.



CONSTRUCTION SITE - HOUSE OF CULTURE AND MUSIC

For the reasons already described for the middle school, we will not be able to keep the planned opening date at the turn of the year for the House of Culture and Music either. But we are sure that we will open our long-awaited cultural center at least in spring 2024.

Construction is progressing every day and large parts of the technical equipment, such as the recording studio, are already in containers on the way to Cambodia. We are looking forward to the first recordings and can hardly wait to experience the first concerts here from our hard-working school children.



Current pictures on our website

Since we have a certain lead time for the printing of this brochure, the pictures in this brochure are already from the beginning of November. We have therefore provided a link that allows you to view the current status of the construction work. Simply scan the QR code or enter smilinggecko.ch/en/kulturbaustelle/ in your browser.



EARLY HEATWAVE CAUSES PROBLEMATIC HARVEST

We have (another) challenging year in agriculture behind us. In addition to the rain that has already been mentioned several times, we also had to contend with extremely high temperatures. Spring in particular was far too warm, which led to below-average harvests for fruits and vegetables. We had big problems with the mangoes for example. We had to harvest many of the fruits too early because otherwise they would have fallen from the trees unripe. A typical reaction to the weather-related stress which the plants were exposed to for weeks.



WITH NEW STRATEGIES AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

The absurd heat of spring may have been an exception, but in principle we see the consequences of climate change more than clearly in Cambodia. That's why we decided to question our current planting and, where possible, rely on more climate-resilient plants.



For example, cabbage palms, which originally come from Brazil. Their palm hearts and fruits are valued there as food. And in fact, the fruits of the tree, marketed as açai berries, are a true superfood. Rich in vitamins and carbohydrates, they will enrich the menu of our school children. For us, however, the palm trees, which are up to 25m high when fully grown, should also fulfill another essential function: as a shade provider for the more sensitive plants that will grow underneath.



A SMILE WITH PAIN

For the second time this year, we were visited by dentists from the University of Zurich, who performed real heroic deeds for us under the motto "Gecko's Smile".



Want an example? In the run-up to their stay with us, the group collected donations on their own initiative to buy, among other things, a portable X-ray machine, which they immediately put into operation. Thanks to the X-ray, teeth can now be examined much more precisely. This has saved many teeth that would have been extracted last year. But even so, many teeth are extracted here. This is because our children's teeth are already severely damaged, even in the very youngest children.

The result of the disastrous combination of early childhood malnutrition, inadequate hygienic options at home and, of course, parents for whom dental hygiene has little relevance. Brushing their teeth every morning is part of the routine at school. But often it is already too late. The teeth are destroyed by caries. In addition, many of the children struggle with abscesses in their mouths.

According to the "Gecko's Smile", the children have to suffer real torments from hell. But they deal with the pain the same way they do in many other areas: with long-suffering and with a smile on their lips. Our little, battered fighters.





OUR MOTTO FOR 2024: “KEEP IT GOING”

With our usual agility, we will continue to drive forward the diversification of the Smiling Gecko project over the next twelve months. In addition to all the ongoing “construction sites”, we have at least three other projects that should be exciting in 2024.



First of all, there is the new metal workshop, which will hopefully enrich our range of craft training companies as early as April. We are also planning a school for cooking and service together with the Cercle des Chefs de Cuisine Zurich and EHL Lausanne, where we want to train young Cambodians not only for the Farmhouse, but for hotels and restaurants throughout Southeast Asia. We would also like to go beyond that - if there are donors from other regions of the world, which we think is quite realistic.

Last but not least, we will also continue to push forward our most spectacular future project, the “University of Applied Science”. Our partners, the University of Zurich and the ZHAW, have already donated a significant amount for a feasibility study. We, in turn, will do everything in our power to ensure that this study is as positive as possible.

So there is still a lot to do. It's good this way!

OUR BIGGEST REQUEST: DONATE TO THE SMILING GECKO CAMPUS



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