

Empowering Girls in Nepal Project

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q1. Why has SIGBI Ltd terminated its partnership with ChoraChori UK (now Pipal Tree, but for the purposes of this document hereinafter referred to as ChoraChori UK), its partner in delivering the Empowering Girls in Nepal project?

A1. In September 2020, the Board of SIGBI Limited were informed that ChoraChori UK and ChoraChori Nepal were no longer working together and that the facility housing displaced children had to close, together with the training programmes in Kathmandu. As a result, a number of SIGBI Trustees met with the Trustees of ChoraChori UK to discuss the situation.

We understand that Nepalese law states that only registered Nepalese NGOs may deliver project work 'on the ground' and as such external charities and NGOs must work via a local partner. The Letter of Agreement (LOA) between SIGBI Ltd and ChoraChori UK became frustrated when ChoraChori Nepal was no longer implementing the agreed project, making the LOA null and void.

The Boards of SIGBI Ltd and ChoraChori UK discussed possible alternative projects. Sadly no relevant project was found to replace our Empowering Girls in Nepal Project.

Q2. Can you explain the 'due process' followed by the Trustees of SIGBI Limited?

A2. As a charity registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales (hereafter referred to as the Charity Commission), the SIGBI Board of Trustees has a duty of care to its members and beneficiaries. The Trustees also have legal and fiduciary responsibilities. To ensure due process was undertaken and followed, the Board contacted the Charity Commission to submit a 'Serious Incident Report'.

A 'Serious Incident' is defined by the Charity Commission as:

An adverse event, whether actual or alleged, which results in or risks significant:

- ***harm to your charity's beneficiaries, staff, volunteers or others who come into contact with your charity through its work (who are collectively referred to throughout this guidance as people who come into contact with your charity through its work)***
- ***loss of your charity's money or assets***
- ***damage to your charity's property***
- ***harm to your charity's work or reputation***

For the purposes of this guidance, "significant" means significant in the context of your charity, taking account of its staff, operations, finances and/or reputation.

The SIGBI Board of Trustees is not at liberty to divulge the content of this report due to the sensitivity of the details contained therein, and it is hoped that members will understand the reasons for this. SIGBI Ltd received a response from the Charity Commission confirming that the Commission was satisfied that the actions taken by SIGBI adequately addressed the situation.

It should be noted that ChoraChori UK also submitted a Serious Incident Report to the Charity Commission.

Q3. Has there been fraud/financial mis-management on the part of ChoraChori UK and/or ChoraChori Nepal.

A3. Members should be assured that SIGBI has not seen or been made aware of any criminal or fraudulent activity involved by Trustees/Employees/Volunteers of ChoraChori UK or ChoraChori Nepal.

Q4. Why has ChoraChori UK changed its name to Pipal Tree?

A4. This question was posed to three Trustees of ChoraChori UK during a meeting with three Trustees of SIGBI Limited. The answer given was:

“We no longer work with ChoraChori-Nepal (which was a separate NGO totally) and have changed our name to avoid further confusion and to reflect broadening interests. The name change has been approved by the Charity Commission (and is shown on its website) but details of the name change were going to be shared after Christmas fundraising is over to avoid confusion and chaos with donated cheques etc”.

Q5: Four entities have been mentioned as connected with Philip Holmes, since the termination: Pipal Tree, Lily’s Leaves, The Mithilia Wildlife Trust and Empowering Girls in Nepal Programme (instead of Project) - do you know anything about these?

A5. Philip Holmes is the CEO of ChoraChori UK. Lily’s Leaves is a social enterprise organisation in Nepal, which we understand will be running training projects in jewellery making and tailoring for women and girls from the Dhanusha area of Nepal. The training will take place in Kathmandu. The SIGBI Board of Trustees has no direct knowledge of the Empowering Girls in Nepal Programme being operated by ChoraChori UK but has seen the notices on the EGiN Facebook page. This is not the proposal received from ChoraChori UK when attempting to resolve the frustration of the Letter of Agreement.

Q6. If ChoraChori UK is to continue with the Empowering Girls in Nepal Programme, why has SIGBI ended its partnership with them? Surely Soroptimists should be supporting disadvantaged and under-served women and girls?

A6. The answer to the first part of this question is given in A1 above. At the SIGBI Conference in Liverpool 2018, the Empowering Girls in Nepal Project was voted in as the new SIGBI Project 2019-2022. As part of the selection process, a clear proposal was submitted setting out the objects and aims of the project and clubs voted to partner with ChoraChori UK based on this.

Despite working very hard to agree a new project with ChoraChori UK, the proposal submitted by them did not meet the same aims and objectives of empowering women and girls, particularly those rescued and rehabilitated as a result of people trafficking. ChoraChori UK is diversifying and broadening its remit to include environmental projects, working predominantly with a Nepalese charity called the Mithilia Wildlife Trust.

ChoraChori UK is also working with the Himalayan Climate Initiative, based in Kathmandu, which concentrates on environmental and education programmes, working through the Mithilia Wildlife Trust.

Q7. Will there be a new project to replace Empowering Women and Girls in Nepal?

A7. The Board will be considering the future of a SIGBI Project, but no decision has been made at this point. Clubs will be informed as soon as a decision has been reached.

Q8. Has Joanna Lumley been informed that the project has ended?

A8. Yes, President Johanna Raffan has written to Ms Lumley informing her the project has come to an end and thanking her for her patronage.

Q9. What is to happen with the Big Stories? Can members have a link to these via the News Briefing?

A9. The Big Stories were sent directly to ChoraChori UK. SIGBI Ltd did not have copies of the Big Stories and unfortunately has no way of accessing them, although we do have the names of those raising the most money. The use of the donations made to The Big Story are a matter for the donors and ChoraChori UK.

Q10. Are you aware that some Soroptimists have been emailing Philip Holmes directly on Facebook and entering into enquiries with him? Indeed some appear to want to still support ChoraChori UK.

A10. The SIGBI Ltd Board of Trustees has no jurisdiction over the charities and projects Members and Clubs wish to support. However, as SIGBI Ltd is no longer in partnership with ChoraChori UK, we have advised that no donations for Empowering Girls in Nepal be sent to SIGBI HQ. The donors of funds held currently by SIGBI will be contacted by Ruth Healey to ask what they wish to do with the monies since the project for which they were raised has ceased.

Q11. What should Clubs, Regions and National Associations do with the monies collected for Empowering Girls in Nepal? Can we redistribute the money to our own charities, or should we wait for a directive from SIGBI?

A11. Clubs, Regions and National Associations may distribute any monies collected as they deem fit. It is advised that in redirecting donations, donors should be advised and their preferences determined and acted upon.

Q12. What monies does Ruth Healey, SIGBI Director of Finance, intend to deal with?

A12. Ruth Healey has written to the CEO of ChoraChori UK asking that any Soroptimist unused, ring-fenced donations to the Empowering Girls in Nepal Project be returned to SIGBI HQ. Funds received will, in turn, be returned to donors, as they cannot be used for any other purpose.

She has also asked what ChoraChori UK's plans are for the money received from the Big Story and through Virgin Giving. It is acknowledged that this money has been donated directly to ChoraChori UK, but SIGBI Members and Clubs would still like to know what is to happen to this money.

No reply has been received as yet so an update will be provided as soon as possible.

Ruth Healey will also be contacting those Clubs whose donations are currently held within a SIGBI suspense account.