



Dear Reader

We hope you and your loved ones are safe despite the unprecedented drought, heat and fires that besiege Australia, and which are increasingly recognised, even by conservatives, as linked with climate change. Many people in the towns and cities where our Australian supporters live have been affected: most obviously by loss of income (e.g from drought), loss of infrastructure and even precious memories (e.g. from fires) and loss of health from heat, multi-factorial stress) and smoke. (See reflections on [smoke](#) by BODHI president Dr Devin Bowles). And many of you will also have been moved by the suffering of other people and animals on this continent, such as of farmers unable to save their herds, flocks and orchards, and even the [cries of koalas](#) trying to flee fire.

This brief letter reports on our two current projects; introduces a new section with a focus on gender, and reflects on global climate change policy, especially as it affects people in "developing" countries, the [global South](#).

Our two main current projects

Each of our two currently active projects are based in the populous Indian state of Maharashtra (*red shading on map*). Each is led by a Dalit, a word sometimes translated as "broken", but



which consciously reflects the pride of a group once known as "untouchables". Both Aryaketu and Karunadeepa (these leaders) have been deeply influenced by the life of the great Indian reformer [Dr Ambedkar](#), as have many of their staff. While some of beneficiaries of these projects are neither Dalit nor Buddhist, they are all inconceivably poor [not only materially] compared to most Australians. Each of these projects originated in India and has significant support from other groups, internationally and, to a lesser extent,

in India.

BODHI Australia is a major and valued supporter of each of these projects. Each seeks to empower poor individuals (especially women and girls) and to develop skills and confidence, for people who face disadvantages unimaginable even compared to most people in India.

[Aryaloka Computer Education](#)

BODHI Australia has actively supported [Aryaloka Computer Education](#) since 2016, four times sending approximately A\$15,000. In December 2019 we transferred 726,000 Indian Rupees (A\$15,176) to help support the training and living expenses of an additional 50 students who will be taught computing courses and other skills in the coming months. Most students are aged between 16 and 30, female, and from poor communities, including sometimes villages without a single computer. Students are also encouraged to join classes to learn English, and all attend workshops on topics such as life coaching, communication and how to develop confidence. This training gives them a chance to avoid a lifetime of grinding manual work where they will always face the risk of exploitation. Our website has further details, including Colin's report when he visited this project in 2018. Recently elected BODHI Australia committee member Dr Ajay Niranjane, who was born in Maharashtra, also visited this project, this month (see photo).



Photo: Aryaketu (centre foreground), with Dr Ajay Niranjane to his right, students and one staff member in the background. Nagpur, January 2020. The organisation Aryaketu founded (in 2000) also has a branch in Chhattisgarh (an adjoining state to Maharashtra), and hopes to expand to Bihar.

[The Bahujan Hitay Women and Child Welfare Society](#)

BODHI Australia also actively supports the [Bahujan Hitay Women and Child Welfare Society](#) based in Pune, Maharashtra. Our support for this society started in 2005, and has gradually increased. In 2019 we organised and funded a [visit](#) to Australia by [Karunadeepa](#), who (as mentioned above) leads this organisation. We also donated

over A\$13,000 to support their work in 2019, including to care for and provide basic education for pre-schoolers in a bustee - an informal settlement (also enabling their parents to go out to work), after school study classes (in a second slum), and for a clinic, staffed by Dr Kamal and a nurse called Shital. Many parents of the children (especially mothers) also attend classes, held several times a year, where they learn about government services they may qualify for, and other ways to improve their lives, including better (but affordable) nutrition, child spacing, and the hazards of early marriage for girls. You can read more on their [website](#).



Image: "Bal Sangopan Kendra" means "child care centre" (in Marathi). Note the banner calling for an end to child marriage. This is a screenshot from their very informative [website](#).

The Tara Report: BODHI's focus on gender equity for women and girls

Welcome! From now on this regular column will explore gender equity issues from the point of view of both celebration and oppression.

Gender inequality persists in our region, undermining economic growth, peace and security, human development and poverty reduction. Women and girls have long been the favoured beneficiaries of BODHI's projects and programmes. In large part, this is the natural consequence of BODHI's work to assist the most disadvantaged groups in developing countries. Women and girls throughout the developing world are poorer, less educated, less healthy and less publicly visible than boys and men. Yet given the opportunity, [women and girls outperform men and boys in the success and impact of their activities](#).

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [acknowledges](#) that:

“The evidence is clear—gender equality is critical to development, economic growth and stability, and must be a key part of aid programming.”

In coming issues, the Tara Report will examine how to:

- explore strategies to promote women's economic empowerment

- highlight ways to end violence against women and girls
- enhance women's voices in decision-making, leadership.

What is BODHI?

Since 1989 BODHI (Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health and Insight) has supported more than 50 development projects mainly in India, Bangladesh, Thailand and the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China.

BODHI is (we think) the world's fourth oldest Buddhist influenced development (aid) organisation based in a high-income country. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, winner of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize (in the photograph with the late British film maker and human rights activist [Yanya Kewley](#)), has been our patron since the 1980s. More on our history is [here](#).



Thanking our donors; expanding our work.

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At its peak (1960s) the Australian government spent almost 60 cents in every \$100 of gross domestic product on foreign aid; this is now only about 20 cents. Some countries, including Britain, give approximately 5 times as much as a proportion. Private donations can help fill this gap.

How to support our work

To help us continue (and expand) our work, please consider making a donation which you can do safely by clicking [here](#). We can no longer accept credit card donations, but bank transfers, Paypal and cheques are fine. (Bank transfers are best, but please let us know about them so we can issue a receipt). Donations are tax deductible if you pay income tax in Australia.

Climate change and its risks to people in the global South

We started this newsletter by mentioning the drought, smoke and fires in Australia. Climate change is also noticeably influencing weather in India, including in 2019 in Pune, which experienced unusually severe flooding during the monsoon (worsened by the [infilling of a lake](#), itself contributed to by population increase). In late 2019 an estimated [45 million](#) people were reported as experiencing food insecurity and even famine in southern Africa. The Bangladeshi activist, Saleemul Huq, recently [described](#) the annual climate change Conference of the Parties (i.e. the main annual meetings) almost as a facade; places where wealthy countries (including Australia) metaphorically prey on vulnerable countries (often called the [global South](#)), including by seemingly routine extensions (days), which exclude participation of most delegates from less materially rich countries. BODHI has warned about the hazards of [climate change](#) almost since its formation, in which time carbon emissions have just kept on rising. The environment, including climate change, was the focus of newsletter number 3 (December 1992).



Now the risks of runaway climate catastrophe are tangible to billions, global policy may follow, not least due to the rise of concern among young people such as Greta Thunberg, justly named by Time Magazine as 2019 person of the year.

