



**December, 2009  
No 37**

# BODHI TIMES

**Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight**  
Founding Patron: His Holiness XIV Dalai Lama  
Founded 1989

Guiding principle: Skillful, compassionate action

Goal: Improve health, education and the environment in developing countries by providing a hook, not a fish

BODHI provides a framework for altruistic people worldwide who are not comfortable working in traditional religious or secular organisations. We ask only for a kind heart.

## What does BODHI do?

We work in low-income settings with local partners at a grassroots level on innovative projects that fall through the cracks of traditional aid in the areas of health, education, the environment, micro-credit and human rights

*In memory of Jim Meyers*

## Maternal & child health promotion, Nepal

Donations in Jim Meyers's name will be donated to the Green Tara Trust (GTT) in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal—tentatively for refresher courses and an event. Dr Jane Stephens



Dr Jane Stephens visits a mother, who is using one of the blankets Green Tara Trust distributes. Photo Green Tara Trust

writes, 'Nepal has some of the worst figures in the world for women and children dying in childbirth, lack of contraceptive use and specific vitamin-related malnutrition. Maternal and infant mortality are linked to young pregnancies, lack of antenatal care, no trained assistant at delivery and poor post natal follow up. HIV and other sexually transmitted infections are increasing rapidly. Nepal is 85% rural. These areas have much worse health indicators than urban areas due to poverty and poor access to health facilities.

"The health system has little money. There are only 5 doctors for 100,000 people (vs over 500 in the US). Many health staff in rural areas do not come to work and have no refresher training. Health indicators and sexual violence have been getting worse since the start of the civil war. The only hope for change is a community-led participatory approach to health through health

*cont p 4*

## Mobile medical clinics underway in Bangladesh

Long-planned mobile medical camps have now begun through Moanoghar Mountain Home in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh, with donations of medicines from the Bangladeshi Government's Civil Surgeon's office. Three villages in the Rangamati district have been selected to participate for two reasons: their inaccessibility due to lack of roads and communications network and the fact that they are disproportionately inhabited by the poorest of the poor, the overwhelming majority of whom belong to Bangladesh's indigenous minorities. Objectives are to:

- \* Provide basic health care services to the most deprived and poorest of the region's indigenous minorities
- \* Raise awareness of the basic health care and hygiene among the communities
- \* Link the communities with the government's health care system
- \* Draw the government's attention to the public health situation in the CHT

Please visit our website for the full story.



Woman smoking at CHT market. Courtesy Philip Gorry

**BODHI is now 20 years old!**

**We've no intention of slowing down. Thanks to you all for your support over the years.**

*See p 3 for New Directions*

## Current Projects

**Literacy & life skills**  
*Monywe, Myanmar/Burma*  
Educating Burma's poorest children



**Mobile Medical Clinics**  
*CHT, Bangladesh*  
Health care for the CHT's most remote inhabitants (see this page)



**Chakma Mahila Samity**  
*Mizoram, NE India*  
2 medical camps so far in this remote part of India



**Over 40 Women's Health**  
*Pune, India*  
Sex education, drug addiction & HIV/AIDS awareness added to cancer diagnosis and health awareness (see p 3)



**Moanoghar Mountain Home**  
*CHT, Bangladesh*  
Australian Jumma community support for this beloved school and orphanage



**SNEHA School**  
*Arunachal Pradesh, India*  
Salaries, supplies & health education & deworming to indigenous refugee children



**Revolving Sheep Bank**  
*Western Tibet*  
Micro-credit to nomads to help preserve traditional way of life (see p 4)



*cont p 3*

**Inside Inside** P2 Medical Director's Desk **Inside Inside** P3 Projects & Other News **Back Back** P4 Revolving Sheep Bank

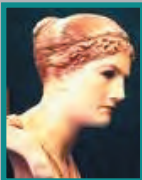
**See new website at [www.bodhi.net.au](http://www.bodhi.net.au) / Become a BODHI friend on Facebook**

# Blaming the victims?

This is written before the Copenhagen climate meeting. As I write, President Obama has announced that no binding decisions will be made at Copenhagen, which reduces the likelihood that the meeting will be another brazen display of hypocrisy. Nonetheless, face-saving platitudes are likely to be have been uttered and more lavish promises made to help developing countries switch to cleaner technology. How many of you remember the Clean Development Mechanism, introduced at the Kyoto climate meeting in 1997? Almost 13 years later, it remains severely underfunded. Look back farther to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the year I wrote a *BODHI Times* editorial about the Demographic Trap: the likelihood that rapid population growth would ensnare some countries in abject poverty and worse, as indeed occurred in Rwanda two years later (see website).

At Rio, generous promises were made to provide "new and additional" finance to help Third World countries switch to more environmentally friendly technologies. Those promises, like so many others, were broken long ago. Seventeen years after Rio, time is running out. I feel like a hybrid of a broken record (or damaged CD) and a male Cassandra (see box).

Recently, the prominent and prolific British writer and activist George Monbiot wrote an essay in *the Guardian*, a major UK newspaper, called "Stop blaming the poor. It's the wally yachters who are burning the planet". Monbiot implied that people concerned with population are blaming the very poor for climate change (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cif-green/2009/sep/28/population-growth-super-rich>).



**Cassandra, the beautiful princess of Troy, was promised the gift of prophecy by the god Apollo, in exchange for her love. She later rejected Apollo, who then cursed her so that no one would believe her prophecies. To this day, most people think a person labelled a Cassandra delivers false warnings, especially of gloom. In fact, Cassandra's predictions were correct.**

Monbiot, like many on the Left, has never shown much regard for or understanding of the compelling human rights and development-based cases to promote family planning in low-income countries. In his essay, Monbiot uses assertion and vilification rather than evidence. He starts by describing a statement issued by the eminent scientist and author James Lovelock, as "ignorant and irrational". The statement that caused such offence was made recently by Lovelock when he became a patron of the UK-based Optimum Population Trust (OPT). Lovelock wrote: "Those who fail to see that population growth and climate change are two sides of the same coin are either ignorant or hiding from the truth. These two huge environmental problems are inseparable and to discuss one while ignoring the other is irrational." Clearly Monbiot disagrees with this, and he reacts to being so grouped.

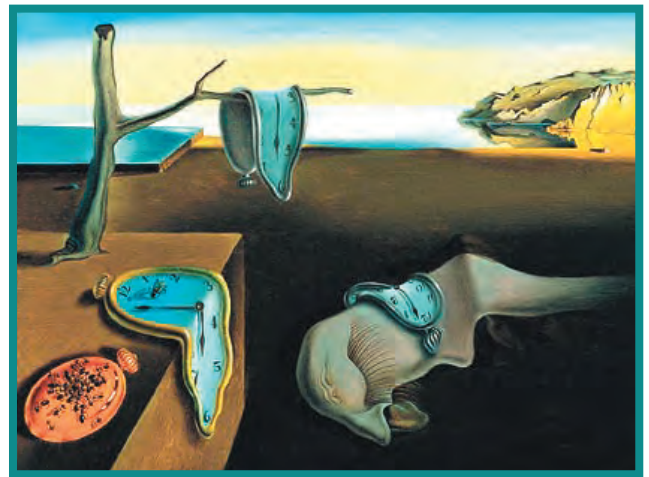
Rather than explain his objections to Lovelock's statement, Monbiot seems to jump to the conclusion

that Lovelock and perhaps the OPT are attributing a substantial fraction of the responsibility for climate change to the poorest of the global population, which has the highest birth rate—people such as famine-plagued peasants in Ethiopia. It is very important to point out that there is no credible argument in the scientific literature to support the gist of this assertion. That a writer of Monbiot's visibility can make this claim is disturbing. Mud can stick. If such a victim-blaming perception were to spread, it would hurt the small sector of the environmental movement with the courage to raise the sensitive and contentious issue of population.

It is true that the 2007 OPT briefing paper "A Population-Based Climate Strategy" is not explicit about the obvious fact that the climatic footprint of the extremely poor (the fourth "claste") is very low, compared to that of the first and second clastes (see *BODHI Times No 14*). But the briefing paper makes no such claim, and such an interpretation would be highly imaginative. Monbiot also describes the OPT as "one of dozens of campaigns and charities whose sole purpose is to discourage people from breeding in the name of saving the biosphere". This is gratuitous. The OPT statement is clear that population limitation, from a climate-causing perspective, is most important in "developed nations such as the UK because of their higher consumption levels". Indeed, the high population growth rates of Australia and the US—still the world's leading per capita greenhouse gas emitters—show the importance of the OPT case.

I interpreted Lovelock's full statement (<http://www.optimumpopulation.org/releases/opt.release26Aug09.htm>) differently than did Monbiot. As I see it, the world has three groups. The first group (the first and second clastes) is very successful at consumption. Most are group-centric, selfish, short-sighted and blind to the warnings of science. They also drive policies which ignore or at least discount the poor. Group 2 (the bulk of the world's population, the third claste) are not yet high consumers, though they are increasing their footprint. Many live in India and China, countries in which a lot of the coal burned is used to produce goods for Group 1.

Members of Group 2 are gradually making a substantial contribution to climate change, but at a far lower per-person rate than the first group. Group 2's population growth rate is falling rapidly. Then there is a third group. Group 3 seriously underconsume, still have high fertility and are very vulnerable to the harmful effects of climate change.



The persistence of memory, Salvador Dali

I am unaware of any evidence that environmental or population activists, including the OPT, link this group with *causing* climate change.

All groups live on the same planet. Group 1 mostly think Group 3 is responsible for its own plight, or is a resource to be plundered for their benefit. Indifference to the fertility dynamics of Group 3 is part of Group 1's world view. In that way, overconsumption and overpopulation are two apples from the same tree. However, the OPT statement does not make this distinction sufficiently clear, leaving itself vulnerable to the interpretation of people like Monbiot.

There is another way in which climate change is relevant to population and population growth. In November, the Bulletin of the World Health Organisation published a paper to which I contributed concerning the harmful impact of rapid population growth in very poor countries, in the context of climate change (<http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/87/11/08-062562.pdf>). For some time, developing countries have been encouraged to submit National [climate change] Adaptation Programmes of Action to the Global Environmental Facility. Two of my co-authors, based in London, analysed the first 40 reports, received until April, 2009. Of these, 37 said rapid population growth exacerbated attempts at adaptation to climate change.

Our paper stresses that neither the population size or growth of the poor is in any way responsible for present levels of climate change; instead we argue that poor societies with high population growth rates are headed for more trouble and that climate change will exacerbate these problems.

Hilary Clinton is said to have raised the issue of India's population with the Indian Minister for Environment, Jairam Ramesh (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/aug/28/india-population-climate-change>). Australia, too, is now on track for 35 million people by 2050, up 60% from its current number. Prime Minister Rudd has hinted that it should receive a special deal because of its growth. If true, such a claim would be quite consistent with recent Australian policies, which pretend to be high-minded and internationalist but in fact are myopic and deeply selfish. Australia can undoubtedly support a higher population, but the world should not have to shoulder the larger ecological footprint this will generate. This is inevitable if Australia continues its current climate change and consumption policies of Promise Much, Achieve Little.

**STOP PRESS** UN report on population and climate change: see website





**Suresh  
Baudha,  
founder,  
Youth  
Buddhist  
Society**

## New directions for BODHI at 20?

We're always evaluating and questioning our projects and directions. We're mull over absorptive capacity, or the amount of funds that grassroots organisations are able to use effectively. Can they grow? How much? There are limits to the speed of such growth. As we grapple with these issues, recent travels have inspired Colin to suggest that BODHI consider two new directions. It's very early days for both of these potential projects. We welcome your involvement as we grow and expand.

### SCHOLARSHIPS IN THAILAND

From talks between Colin and Prof Bruce Wilcox ([http://www.ecohealth.net/www\\_brucewilcox.php](http://www.ecohealth.net/www_brucewilcox.php)) has arisen the idea of BODHI providing educational scholarships of A\$1,000/US\$990 each year to five promising indigenous Hill Tribe students for the Mae Fah Luang University in Chiang Rai, Thailand. Prof Wilcox says, "It is essential that we build capacity in this region, and this requires fighting the tide of exodus of good students, faculty and health care workers to Bangkok and other major urban centres." The area is experiencing a resurgence of HIV/AIDS.

### YOUTH BUDDHIST SOCIETY

In August, 2009, Colin visited the Youth Buddhist Society (YBS) in Mainpuri, six hours by train from Delhi toward Kanpur, with Sari Kovats of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and SNEHA's Susanta Chakma. They visited many schools, nurtured and partly supported by YBS, which in total educate about 3,750 poor boys and girls in villages in Uttar Pradesh. The schools were built in the absence of sufficient state schools and funded by local farmers and villagers. The teachers are not fully qualified. Their salary is about INR 2,000 per month; state schoolteachers receive INR 10,000.

Colin hopes to return to Delhi and Mainpuri in 2010 to participate in a workshop to improve teachers' skills. BODHI would allocate A\$10,000 per annum to upgrade teachers' skills and purchase furnishings, library books and other school materials. We are considering food supplementation for students of two eggs each week. The eating of eggs is almost zero.

## What's new

**SNEHA SCIENCE LAB.** BODHI is stocking a science laboratory at the SNEHA School in Diyun, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

**OVER-40 WOMEN'S HEALTH.** We are now helping 2,500 people by adding sex, drug addiction and HIV/AIDS education to the cancer diagnosis and health awareness through self-examination camps that Dr Manda Mune and her team run in eight Pune slums and a tribal village. Sex education is offered through residential camps for school and college students as well as dropouts in the community.

**CONTINUING EDUCATION.** BODHI is partially funding Dr Manda Mune of the Over 40 Women's Health Project to visit Kathmandu, Nepal in March, 2010 to learn about health promotion from Dr Jane Stephens of the Green Tara Trust.

**NEW WEBSITE.** Finally! It's finished, to our great relief. Graphic Ark ([www.graphicark.com.au](http://www.graphicark.com.au)) donated the design and much of the production help. Denis and Susan laboured night and day for months. We hope you like it.

**BODHI ON FACEBOOK.** We now have a presence on Facebook, open to all.

### Current Projects

*cont fr p 1*

**MITINI NEPAL ENGLISH & COMPUTER SKILLS TRAINING**  
*Kathmandu, Nepal*  
Skills training for Nepalese lesbians



**HEALTH FOR UNDER-NOURISHED TRIBAL CHILDREN**  
*Pune, India*

Medical & nutritional help to slum children, awareness of family planning & early girl child marriages



**GREEN TARA TRUST**  
*Kathmandu Valley, Nepal*  
Health services for Nepal's most disadvantaged & maternal & child health (see main story p 1)



**TASHI LHAPUG HEALTH CARE CENTRE**  
*Eastern Tibet*  
Seed funds for a traditional health clinic in remote Eastern Tibet, for medical care to 8,000 people



**UDANA SPECIAL CHILDREN'S CENTRE**  
*Colombo, Sri Lanka*  
Support for a school for children with physical and learning disabilities



**TRAIN THE TRAINER**  
*Kathmandu, Nepal*  
Pilot to increase literacy & health awareness among hearing impaired children



*Please see website for project details*

## Thank you

Bev Buckland, Tasmania, Australia  
Margaret Butler, NSW, Australia  
Prof. Ken Cassman, Nebraska, USA  
Dr. Don & Julie Clark, Tasmania, Australia  
Ken & Karen Cohen, California, USA  
Patricia Earhart, NSW, Australia  
Dr. Tony Edwards, NSW, Australia  
Jane Hudspeth, Tasmania, Australia  
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Dr. Gerry & Sally McGushin, Tasmania, Australia  
Dr. Christopher Meyers, California, USA  
Dr. Roscoe Taylor, Tasmanian, Australia  
Wanda H Trimmingham, California, USA  
Geraldine & Brian Warren, Tasmania, Australia  
Dr. Annie Whybourne, NT, Australia  
and

\* Alex von Hildebrand of WHO for helping Colin to visit Mainpuri near Agra in India  
\* Sari Kovats and Susanta Chakma, Colin's travelling companions to the Youth Buddhist Society in Mainpuri  
\* Ric and Jo Easton of Bio-Distributors, Sheffield, Tasmania, Australia for continuing support.

## We need your help

*Thanks to your generosity, BODHI has supported many exciting and innovative projects. To continue, we need your help.*

*To be tax-deductible, Australian cheques must be made out to  
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*Also available: Direct-debit facilities (contact us) and PayPal in both U.S. & Australian dollars*

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# Revolving Sheep Bank

*Prof Goldstein and Susan spoke at length about the Revolving Sheep Bank in August. The Revolving Sheep Bank is fantastically successful,' he said. 'Nomads in the far west, near the Indian border, have travelled many miles to the area to learn more about it.' The trial project has also been successfully adopted by other NGOs working in Tibet. Here's Prof. Goldstein's edited report.*

In August, 2005 and June 2009, my colleagues Dr. Cynthia Beall and Dr. Ben Jiao and I conducted an assessment of the 5 year trial Revolving Sheep Bank program in the two xiang (rural townships) where we conducted our research: Nyingo and Khunglung. The project assisted around 120 Tibetan nomads living in two communities in Ngamring county.

The goals of the Revolving Sheep Bank were:

1. To provide poor nomad families with a five-year loan of reproductive age female sheep in order to foster their moving from poverty or near-poverty to economic self-sufficiency.
2. To simultaneously create a self-perpetuating 'sheep bank' that will provide each of the two participating communities with a capital fund of 100 fertile female sheep at the end of 5 years and thereby enable it to continue to lend sheep to poor households after the end of the trial period.

## ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

The 5 year trial Revolving Sheep Bank was begun in August 2000 in two nomad xiang. Each year, 4 poor nomad households (2 in each xiang) were given a loan of 50 high quality ewes (fertile reproductive age female sheep [or goats]). These ewes were generally purchased by local officials from richer nomads in the same area with project funds. In each of the subsequent four years, 4 new families, two in each community, were loaned 50 ewes each. During the trial period, therefore, a total of 1,000 sheep were provided by the project to 20 households.

### Maternal & child health fr p 1

promotion. By the time someone is ill there is little or no facility for treatment."

GTT's work directly benefits 5,500 people—mainly women and teenagers, although there is a men's group—by monthly updates of pregnant women and women with children under two years of age. GTT provides a full-time health promoter to train health staff and local volunteers, and to facilitate group discussion and guide and motivate behaviour change. Mothers and neonates receive group training in pregnancy and post-natal care, mentoring, clean delivery kits and post-natal checks. The health promoter works with local general practitioners, government and non-governmental organisations to improve health services locally and nationally.

GTT and the new women's NGO formed from the groups held a mass event this year, a Teej (mother-in-law festival), which focused on neonatal care and gender



Sorting sheep to be loaned for the Revolving Sheep Bank

Copyright  
M.C.  
Goldstein and  
C.M. Beall

Each of the recipient households signed formal contracts requiring them to repay ½ of their loan in fertile female sheep at the end of year 04 (without interest), and half in year 05. Each recipient also has a formal guarantor. Consequently, from year 05 onwards, the community Sheep Bank will be receiving 100 ewes per year in repayments and will continue to loan two households each year with 50 ewes. So long as each household repays its loan, this will continue indefinitely.

**The nomads were extremely grateful for the assistance. Virtually all came to thank us and say how this has changed their life. It was very moving.**

The households were selected by the elected officials in each of the communities in consultation with xiang officials. We specified that they should oversee the allocation and ensure that the recipient households were using the loan properly, i.e., were not killing the animals for meat or selling them for other goods. In several early cases, the nomad community took back the sheep because a household was not using them correctly and gave them to other families.

The program has been enormously successful and in both communities 100% of the sheep

were repaid on time and new households allocated loans with the repaid sheep. As a result, during the course of the trial, 20 households received loans of 1,000 sheep. Since the end of the trial program, i.e., when the repayments started, 20 new households (4 per year) have received 50 ewes each (total = 1,000 sheep or in a few cases goats). In other words the Revolving Sheep Bank has been successfully created and is operating successfully on its own run by the local communities, hopefully for decades to come. At the time of the sheep bank loan, 100% were below the poverty line (30/person). After it (in 2009), 25% were below but 75% had risen above the poverty line.

Those who have not yet received the Sheep Bank loan also all said that this is the best program they have had and the most effective for them. The local and county leaders also said the same thing. They said that this provides assistance in a way that really allows nomad households to improve their economic status (and self-esteem).

The project has now spread to many other communities in these two rural townships (xiang), and the xiang officials said that officials from xiang in Ali Prefecture have come to learn how to operate the sheep bank program in their area. Also we are told that the government itself has started to incorporate some of these techniques, for example making written contracts with recipients of the aid it provides.

Please see website for full report with table.



Men's group. Green Tara Trust

disparity around income generation. "This is the first time these women have ever come out for a festival on their own and disobeyed their husbands," Dr Stephens writes.

"We work with people from the whole community as everyone contributes to creating a health culture. For example, husbands have a strong influence on whether a woman has an assisted delivery here. Anyone over 13 years of age can participate in programme planning, implementation and mentoring. We actively seek out minority and disadvantaged groups and ensure they are able to be involved and voice their issues. Given the current political situation in Nepal we make a particular point of regularly meeting with all political groups in the programme areas, including Maoist rebels, to ensure there is a common understanding and engagement in the work. There are currently no problems." See website for more.

See new website at [www.bodhi.net.au](http://www.bodhi.net.au) / Become a BODHI friend on Facebook

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**June, 2010  
No 38**

# BODHI TIMES

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**Founding Patron: His Holiness XIV Dalai Lama**  
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Goal: Improve health, education and the environment in developing countries by providing a hook, not a fish

BODHI provides a framework for altruistic people worldwide who are not comfortable working with traditional religious or secular organisations. We ask only for a kind heart.

## What does BODHI do?

We work in low-income settings with local partners at a grassroots level on innovative projects that too often fall through the cracks of traditional aid in the areas of health, education, the environment, micro-credit and human rights

## New local partner

# Hill tribes in Thailand

In the last newsletter we mentioned an evolving educational project in northern Thailand, with a health component. It is developing into scholarships for destitute children, especially from hill tribes. Currently, Prof Bruce Wilcox (well known to Colin) is establishing a small foundation in Thailand to improve health and development in the northern Thai border areas. BODHI hopes to "piggy-back" on administrative expenses so that most or all of our donation goes to the children. This will require a 4-year commitment of about \$10,000 per year.

## Benevolent family intervention

Our funds will also cover what Prof Wilcox calls "benevolent family intervention." He says, "What I've seen that prevents a family from sending a promising child to school is not simply the lack of fees, books and uniforms ... if you simply give money for "school" there's a good chance it will be diverted to other purposes, and you won't even know this because people are often so desperate.

So, finding and enabling promising children to go to school will often require much more than providing the money for school. It could include benevolent family interventions to deal with any number of things.

"I recall in one case we considered paying to install a locking door on the family's shack to prevent the father from beating the mother and grandma when he came home drunk at night. (He'd have to sleep it off outside.) Simply paying for school wasn't going to solve this child's inability to advance educationally!

"In another case, some families couldn't afford to buy rice a couple of years ago when the price rose abruptly. We bought and delivered a 50-kilogram bag to the mother of one boy we were helping with school fees so she wouldn't spend all her time insuring her family had enough food each day. Basic needs higher on Maslow's hierarchy trump education.

"There are seven broad groups of hill tribes in Thailand: Karen, Lahu, Hmong, Paduang, Lisu, Akha and Mien."

## Tibet ... As we go to press ... Tibet

Some of you may be wondering if the recent Tibetan earthquakes have affected the health clinics we support. Conrad Richter of Gaden Relief Projects, BODHI's partner organisation, writes from Canada:

"We are discussing moving the Jamseng Health Clinic to Zadoh City, to where Yushu refugees are migrating. Because of the near total destruction of Yushu City, many people

have moved in with family in nearby areas including Zadoh. The population of Zadoh City is growing fast and the services there are inadequate. Now, in the aftermath of the quakes I think we are more likely to make this move. Already we have requested information on the costs of moving and renting a facility in the city."

We are waiting to hear about the Tashi Lhapug Health Care Centre.



Children in the Indian city of Pune (see p. 3). Courtesy JEEVAK

## Some Current Projects

### Literacy & life skills Monywe, Myanmar/Burma

Educating Burma's poorest children



### Mobile Medical Clinics Bangladesh

Health care for oppressed remote indigenous minorities



### Over 40 Women's Health Pune, India

Sex education, drug addiction, HIV/AIDS, cancer diagnosis; general health awareness



### SNEHA School Arunachal Pradesh, India

School salaries, supplies, health education & deworming for indigenous refugee children



### Revolving Sheep Bank Western Tibet

Interest-free micro-credit to help nomads preserve their traditional way of life



### Mitini Nepal English & Computer Skills Training Kathmandu, Nepal

Skills training for Nepalese lesbians



### Health for Under-nourished Tribal Children Pune, India

Medical & nutritional help to slum children, awareness of family planning & child marriages



### Green Tara Trust Kathmandu Valley, Nepal

Health promotion and services for Nepal's most disadvantaged; maternal & child health



### Tashi Lhapug Health Care Centre Eastern Tibet

Seed funds for traditional health clinic for 8,000 people



**Inside** P2 Medical Director's Desk

**Inside** P3 Project updates & more

**Back** P4 Trip Report: Mizoram

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# Lessons from the Black Death

When I wrote the last essay for this page, the approaching Copenhagen climate change mega-conference (December, 2009) was daily news. Now it is almost forgotten.

The anti-climate change lobby is rubbing its hands with glee — temporarily. They see the Copenhagen meeting as a deserved failure. Two events have been used to try to discredit climate science. “Climategate” refers to the theft of private emails between climate scientists from Britain’s University of East Anglia. None of these emails casts serious doubt on the basic science of climate change, which involves thousands of separate pieces of evidence, but they do reveal this group of scientists to be fallible human beings. The second event used to discredit climate science is the discovery of minor errors in the 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report. One mistake concerned the speed of melting of the Himalayan glaciers. Although wrongly predicted to occur by 2035, this appeared only in the fine print. However, these events have greatly harmed the cause for climate change action in Australia, the US, Canada and India. There are increasing and disturbing reports of vilification of climate scientists. Some receive anonymous hate mail. Examples abound of malicious language associated with frank anti-science in the blogosphere.

Though some who attended the Copenhagen meeting claim it had several positive outcomes, I think it will be forgotten much more quickly than the 1992 conference in Rio de Janeiro, which successfully placed sustainable development on the global agenda — even though it failed to substantially alter the course of our collective human environmental onslaught.

A recent *Nature* paper describes the Copenhagen Accord pledges as paltry. Its authors warn that current national greenhouse gas emission targets might lock the world into exceeding 3 °C warming. This would initiate feedbacks that trigger accelerated warming due to the release of additional greenhouse gases from stores such as the Arctic tundra and the Amazon rainforest. In turn, this positive

feedback will cause further warming that generates additional gas release, ice melt and so on.

## The Black Death & climate deniers

Meanwhile, anti-climate activists are celebrating in a way reminiscent of people who may have welcomed infected, plague-bearing rats into Europe at the start of what is known as the Black Death. This plague killed 30% to 60% of Europe’s inhabitants, reducing the world’s population from an estimated 450 million to between 350 and 375 million in 1400. This was an utter catastrophe for the generation that endured it. As far as I know, there were no such rat-welcomers, but one can easily imagine sceptics of the time devising a media scare campaign targeted at those who feared and opposed the rats. They could say truthfully, “Europe has never had a plague epidemic”, “Our population is at a record high” and “How can an invisible organism harm us? Rats and their fleas have been in Europe for centuries.”

We now know this organism as *Yersinia pestis*, transmitted by fleas but not discovered until 1894 by Alexandre Yersin. Imagine scientists of the day saying, “In Mongolia, the local people have taboos that reduce close contact with the local rodent, a potentially flea-bearing, plague-transmitting animal called a marmot. These same nomadic people have a custom which makes them break camp whenever nearby marmots become ill” (William McNeill, 1976, *Plagues and Peoples*, p. 167). And imagine the sceptics discounting this knowledge as stemming from “primitive” people a long way away. Why divert scarce public funds to anti-rat campaigns? You have nothing to fear!

Today, the anti-climate science lobby similarly ridicules both scientific and indigenous knowledge. A website called *Energy, Carbon Dioxide and Earth’s Future* argues that even a trebling of the minuscule quantity of the main greenhouse gas (carbon dioxide, CO<sub>2</sub>) from 280 parts per million to 840 parts per million would be trivial. (It is now about 390 parts per million.) It provides no scientific reference for this statement and simply appeals to common sense. But the Romans understood that the dose

makes the poison. It does not take much carbon monoxide in a closed space to induce drowsiness; trebling that dose will kill you quickly.

No one is arguing that climate change will end life on Earth, but instead that runaway climate change imperils civilisation (see Butler and Harley, “Primary, secondary and tertiary effects of eco-climatic change: the medical response”, *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, 2010, available free on line at <http://pmj.bmj.com/content/86/1014/230.full.pdf>). This is plausible by pathways that include sea-level rise, impaired crop yields, large-scale population dislocation and conflict.

## Peak oil and climate change

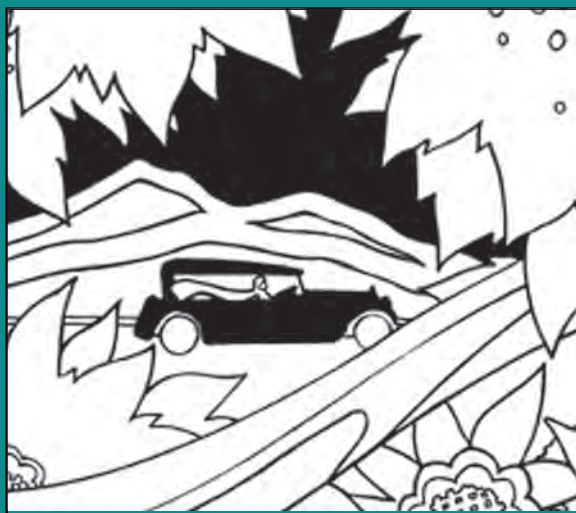
The imminence, reality and danger of peak oil have been boosted by a scientific paper in press in *Energy Policy* co-written by Sir David King, former chief scientist for the UK. In my opinion, the rising cost of energy due to peak oil is an even more important short-term global environmental problem than is climate change. The two issues have an important and worrying interaction. As conventional oil becomes increasingly scarce, energy companies are turning to unconventional energy sources. Fossil fuel-based energy (oil, coal, gas, coal-seam gas) remains far cheaper to develop in energy terms than renewables.

Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) will rise even higher as the world shifts to coal and tar sands in Canada and Venezuela. Both population increase and elevated GHG emissions per unit of energy produced are eroding improvements in energy efficiency. An illustration of our desperation for continuing cheap energy is the invasion of Iraq, in which the role of oil is now widely acknowledged. In Queensland, Australia, tensions are emerging between coal gas miners and farmers, whose land is being damaged by mine infrastructure. We are also seeing the consequences of a catastrophic offshore oil well accident: the enormous oil slick in the Gulf of Mexico that is devastating marine ecosystems and imperiling human livelihoods.

## Conclusion

Greeks resent the impending decline in living standards as their economy collapses. Clearly, many there and in such other countries as the UK have been living well beyond their means for years. Similarly, the whole global first and second clastes (see *BODHI Times* No. 15) have been living beyond their environmental means for generations. It is delusional to think that humans can convert the natural capital of coal, gas and iron ore into money which then can be turned into forms of wealth to replace that lost natural capital. For example, while oil can be partly substituted by wind turbines, it is a poor replacement. Civilisation still functions, but our situation today is analogous to consumers in Greece three years ago. They thought the good times would continue forever, even though Hubris and its punisher, Nemesis, are central to Greek mythology.

The Plague is now much feared and the lessons taught by the Black Death understood, hundred of years later. But as a civilisation we are very far from absorbing the lessons that peak oil and climate change are about to teach us.



**Driving  
too fast,  
running  
on  
empty**

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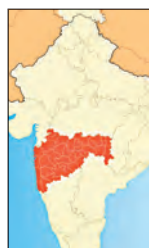


# What's new

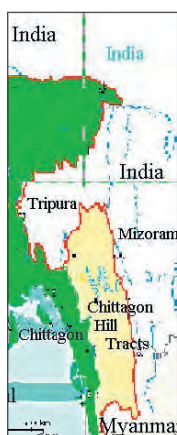
Following are report excerpts and updates on a few BODHI projects.



Sagaing state,  
Myanmar/Burma



Maharashtra  
state, India



Mizoram, NE India  
& CHT, Bangladesh

## Myanmar/Burma. Educating farm and destitute children

Dr Ko Tar writes, "Our monastic education is going well. This year it caters for about 100. It does not increase in numbers of students; some students left the school as they have to work at home or in the fields. Two teachers are now attending RWCT training at Mandalay. RWCT is Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking. There they will be learning some skills as well: kitchen gardening, composting, brick making, charcoal making and also coaching and awareness.

"We are setting up a centre for promotion of monastic education in Mandalay. Our school is one of ten schools which are selected to get the opportunity for training. I help make the curriculum. Your financial help is great."

## Pune, India. Caring for undernourished nomadic tribal children

**0-5 year olds.** "There is satisfactory growth, weight gain and fewer infectious diseases. Parents are now sending neat and tidy children to school. Some women were counseled about family planning; some have started using contraceptives, including very young mothers."

**New for 2010:** Anaemia testing for 150 women, classes for adults on the importance of nutrition and education and stress on awareness of family planning and early girl child marriages.

## Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. Mobile medical clinics

"Moanoghar's mobile medical clinics are underway. About 15-20 patients were given free treatment/drugs during each visit. So far about 2,100 patients have taken treatments for common diseases such as cough and colds, respiratory infections, viral fever/flu and diarrhoea and intestinal ailments.

The clinics provide free prescriptions, free drugs (when available) and training in the following, in which about 300 people have participated: reproductive health (adolescent girls & women); awareness on basic hygiene & sanitation; malaria prevention; and basic child & maternal health.

## Northeast India. Medical camps in Mizoram.

See p. 4 for the latest on Chakma Mahila Samity (CMS), the Chakma women's group which has conducted two medical camps.

**Teacher's salary in Arunachal Pradesh.** In addition to our expanded support for the SNEHA school in Diyun, we also paid the annual salary of one teacher at the SNEHA school in Bijoypur.

# Thank you

Dr Peter Balram, QLD, Australia  
Dr Warren Bell, British Columbia, Canada  
Dr Alison Bleaney, OBE, Tasmania, Australia  
Dr Jenni Bond, Tasmania, Australia  
Annie Brennan, Tasmania, Australia  
Prof Bob Douglas, AO, ACT, Australia  
Prof Mark & Dian Elvin, England, UK  
Dr Pam Fenerty, Tasmania, Australia  
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and  
\* Ric and Jo Easton of Bio-Distributors, Sheffield, Tasmania, Australia for continuing support.

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## BODHI supporters in environmental health struggles

Two friends of BODHI were recently featured on Australian national television. The long campaign by Dr Alison Bleaney, with colleagues, to highlight abnormal levels of health disorders in people, oysters and the Tasmanian devil were featured on *Australian Story* and linked to a nearby forestry plantation (<http://www.abc.net.au/austory/specials/somethingwater/default.htm>). Soon after, A/Professor Nick Higginbotham was interviewed in an investigation by *Four Corners* into the health effects of open cut coal mining in the Hunter Valley, the hinterland of Newcastle, the world's busiest coal port (<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2010/s2867659.htm>).

The disquieting theme linking these stories is how state governments (Tasmania and NSW) placed commercial interest (forestry and coal mining) well before public health. In the case of NSW, public funding for studies has long been refused because it is claimed the size of the community at risk (about 40,000 people) is too small to detect any hazard.

This reason is spurious; valid only if the effect is very slight and the investigation very unambitious. In the Tasmanian case, the authorities were left embarrassed when the dedicated self-funded work of Alison and her colleagues found a previously unidentified toxin, originating from the forestry plantation.

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# Mizoram trip report

*In March, 2010, BODHI Community Adviser Mr Kulottam Chakma visited Mizoram, NE India, as BODHI's representative. An edited version of his self-funded trip report follows.*

Recently I spent five days in Mizoram, home to 100,000 Chakmas. BODHI has been funding mobile medical clinics in cooperation with the women's group Chakma Mahila Samiti (CMS) for two years. On 26 March I flew from Kolkata to Aizawl by Kingfisher Airlines on a propeller driven aircraft. It took about 1½ hours.

## On roads narrow and deep

Aizawl is perched on the mountains. The roads are narrow and steep. Mizos are highly urbanised. Almost half of the state's 800,000 people live in Aizawl. Almost all the Mizos wear western dress. Mizo women are very enterprising. Most of the grocery and fashion stores are run by Mizo women. There are also many Bengali businesses, mainly transport, construction, steel and furniture business. As the capital of a predominately Christian state, Aizawl has many well-built churches.

Next day at 6 am I started my journey to Chawngte, about 400 kilometres away, in a convoy of two vehicles. The road is winding and narrow, with deep ravines almost all along the road and very few safety barriers. If a vehicle veers off the road and plunges into the ravine, there is no hope of survival.



Two Lai boys. Photos courtesy Kulottam Chakma

Around midday we stopped at a roadside restaurant for lunch. The restaurant was owned and operated by a Mizo lady. During the lunch I had the opportunity to chat with Mr. Kalikumar Tonchongya. According to him, the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) lacks basic facilities like health, education and jobs. By Indian standard even electricity, telephone and water supply are unreliable.

Chawngte is the CADC's capital. The CADC, population around 40,000, covers about 1,500 square kilometers and is shaped like a necktie. North-south it's 100 kilometers, with an east-west average of 15. The government does not recognise the name, given by the Chakmas in respect of Indira Gandhi's mother, Kamala Nehru. Compared to Indian standard, Chawngte is exceptionally clean. Residents regularly burn garbage to keep the city tidy.

Chakmas of Mizoram take tremendous pride in their identity. Chakma women almost always wear traditional *pinon khadi*, which is exceptional since no other tribe in Mizoram wear traditional costume as every day functional dress. They speak the Chakma language with purity, without corrupting with Bengali words. CADC administration has worked very hard to introduce Chakma script to schools and among the general populace. Most of the signs in Chawngte are in Chakma.

## CMS's mobile health camps

Sunday, 28th February. I met Jyotsna Chakma, the president of CMS, who was on a meditation retreat. Most of the shops and offices were closed except some grocery stores. In the afternoon, courtesy of CMS, I went to Udalthana and Bajeisora, the two villages in which CMS conducted mobile health camps. Udalthana is hardly three kilometers from the perimeter of Chawngte, yet looks very impoverished. The further that villages are from Chawngte, the more impoverished they are. Most of the houses have thatched roofs. Bajeisora is better off than Udalthana. Both villages are clean and tidy, like any other Chakma village.

Before sunset, I visited the bazaar. Hawkers were selling vegetables. Some Bengalis were lazing around. Construction works were going on. There were fires on some garbage dumps. That's how the residents of Chawngte control their garbage. I crossed the bridge over the Tuichong River into the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC). I met two drunken Lai boys who insisted I take their photograph, so I did. They were excited when I showed them their picture on the camcorder screen.

Monday, 1st March. In the morning I went to the bazaar. It was crowded with people. Chakma

women in traditional dress were selling and buying goods. The bazaar had sections for vegetables, dried fish, meat and clothes.

## Step-motherly mentality

The Chakma community in Mizoram suffers from a multitude of problems. There is no hospital for the CADC's 40,000 people. The closest is at Lunglei, at least five hours' drive from Chawngte. Electricity, water supply and telecommunications are unreliable even by Indian standard. Chakmas in Lunglei and Mamit districts live even in worse condition, with no health care, jobs, education and commerce.

The relationship between the Chakmas & Mizos has never been easy. Historically, there is deep mistrust between the Chakmas and the Mizos — not surprising, given their very different backgrounds. For centuries, Mizos were hunter-gatherers; Chakmas were nomadic farmers.

At 88%, Mizoram has the second highest literacy rate in India after the state of Kerala, with 90%. The Chakma literacy rate in Mizoram is 45%. The government has been unable to create white collar jobs to match the high literacy rate. Consequently, many educated Mizo youths cannot find jobs, and are unwilling to work with their hands.

The combination of mistrust and lack of white-collar jobs has created a step-motherly mentality among the Mizos. For example, Chakmas are 10% of the state's population, yet there are no Chakmas in the Mizoram police, civil service or university. Mizos are unwilling to share with the minorities whatever few jobs the government can create. Needless to say, there are no health care facilities in Chakma-inhabited areas.

The Chakmas in Mizoram are hard-working and proud of their heritage. They live in a difficult environment and face systematic discrimination. Chakma communities, especially those in remote areas, are vulnerable and need help in health care and education. They need investments and loans to create jobs, or else they become prey to hunger, disease, loan sharks and the missionaries.

For full report, please see <http://www.bodhi.net.au/pdfs/tripreportmizoram10.pdf>



Children in Bajisora village

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