

BODHI TIMES

Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI)

December 2004

No 27

We aim sustainably to improve health, education and the environment in developing countries by providing a hook, not a fish. BODHI was founded in 1989 on the principle of skillful, compassionate action and is neither religious nor political. We have supporters and advisers from many faiths. We encourage your ideas and acts of kindness. Realising the interdependence of all beings is in our enlightened self-interest. Now more than ever, if we don't work together to reduce the world's much-discussed problems, then who will?

Projects new . . . and old

BODHI has long hoped to reach out into other areas of the world. While it's easy to throw money at popular causes, we've tried to honour a different mandate, choosing knottier, less glamorous and riskier projects and people to support. At the same time, we feel our responsibilities to our loyal supporters very keenly, so we're very cautious in our decisions. Currently, while projects are developing on the Indian subcontinent, we've decided to support an educational project in the Philippines.

Northeast India

Projects proceed slowly in areas so remote and difficult to access. We'll have more to report at a future date. Meanwhile, we're exploring funding with the Tata Foundation to conduct a proper trial of the parasite control program described in the last issue of BODHI Times, perhaps with support from North Eastern Hill University based in Shillong, Meghalaya. We're also investigating supporting NEIDAC (North East India Drug and AIDS Care) (www.neidac.org). The Northeast has one of the highest incidence and prevalence of HIV/AIDS in India.

Kenya

Through a contact with Professor Willis Oluoch-Kosura, at the University of Nairobi, there may also be a chance trialling the parasite treatment program described in the last newsletter.

The Philippines

BODHI is working with the Grameen Foundation Australia to provide educational loans to destitute students at the University of Eastern Philippines (UEP) in Northern Samar that may prevent them from dropping out. Apparently most of the 7,000 students at the campus are fairly poor. Among them are a couple of hundred students whose families the university classifies as 'destitute.'

'I went into the homes of a few of them,' reports a Grameen Foundation supporter. 'The sight of crushing poverty, dispossession, and even nakedness made it

hard to imagine how these families managed to put a child through the school system and now through the university.' Sometimes these families produced one child who 'shone like a star,' whose talent could not be killed, even by hunger and malnutrition. 'Parents and extended family pitched in to put the wretched child through the school system, and now through the University.'

Every year about 100 such students kids defy odds and enter the UEP. Half of them eventually succumb to crushing financial pressure and drop out before completing their studies. Those who make it break the poverty cycle for their family and extended families. The University charges only 50 pesos per unit per semester; students must maintain at least 18 units for a full-time load. That is about 1000 pesos (A\$25) per semester. Another 1000 pesos provides books and other costs. A\$50 per semester will make a large contribution towards student's total costs.

The Grameen Foundation has agreed to provide A\$10,000 per year for four years to get this scheme going with 100 destitute students.

The UEP cooperative wants the money to be given to the students as a loan rather than as a scholarship. They suggest that to ensure repayment the loan agreement should be with the family and co-signed by the neighbours. The UEP cooperative is determined to ensure the eventual sustainability and self-funding of the scheme.

The Dean pointed out that such students will pass the \$100 (4000 pesos) given to him to their families, whose needs are great. The only way to ensure that this money is utilised by the individual student is to pay the university fee directly and disburse the remaining amount in 400 pesos (A\$10) monthly instalments.

The university is willing to administer this scheme at its own cost and has agreed to form a panel of academics to act as an independent selection committee.

East Timor

We are still investigating potential projects in this newly independent country.

Tibet

For news on the Revolving Sheep Bank, please see page 3.

Nomads in Tibet, among those who received sheep and goats last year.

Please see story on page 3.

Photo courtesy Prof. Goldstein and Dr. Beall



The real costs of climate change

After a hiatus, concerns about global warming returned in the late 1980s, and have been a theme in this column since 1991. In the same year William Nordhaus, a leading US economist, published an influential analysis on the cost effectiveness of abating climate change. Nordhaus estimated that a doubling of CO₂ to 560 parts per million (ppm) would reduce US gross national product by a trifling 0.25% and that at the most, World National Product (WNP) would be reduced by 2%, with most of this cost borne by poor countries. (Two percent of the current WNP of US\$40 trillion is about US\$800 billion). Though Nordhaus cautioned that his findings should not be used as an argument for a *laissez faire* approach to the greenhouse effect, a generation of conservative economists and policy makers have in fact used his conclusions to justify inaction and complacency.

Optimism and naïveté also were evident at the 2004 Copenhagen Consensus in which eight prominent economists were asked to prioritize how US\$50 billion, spent over five years, could best be used to address a prearranged list of challenges, including HIV/AIDS, under-nutrition, poor health services and climate change. As economist Jeffrey Sachs, a critic of this conference has pointed out, US\$10 billion per annum is a minuscule amount compared to the scale of these challenges. For example, the US military spends almost US\$450 billion per annum, while the total amount globally spent on aid is about US\$70 billion. If rich countries increased their aid spending to 0.7% of their GNP (as many have claimed to aspire to), this would increase by US\$140 billion.

Complacency

Of the challenges listed, dealing with climate change was ranked lowest by the Copenhagen meeting. This conclusion was widely publicized. This complacency about climate change is based on three key, uncertain assumptions:

The first is that when Nordhaus published his study there was consensus that a doubling of CO₂ would cause a warming of between 1 and 3°C. Now, the most probable range has risen to 1.5-4.5°C, and the upper boundary looks likely to increase further. Climate change has far more effects than temperature increase. There is also debate about the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, the speed and degree of sea level rise and the impact of climate change

upon the world agricultural system. It is not hard to imagine sequences of climatic effects that trigger adverse economic and social consequences of sufficient power to undermine, or even reverse development, leading to falls in the WNP much greater than 2%.

Up in smoke

Some of these concerns are listed in 'Up in Smoke,' a recent document sponsored by a group of eighteen development NGOs (<http://www.ewg.org/reports/upinsmoke/pr.html/>) (see also forthcoming *Lancet* commentary by McMichael and Butler).

A second assumption implicit in the mainstream economic literature is also dubious. Nordhaus's original cost-benefit calculations assumed a concentration of CO₂ at double its pre-industrial level. In March 2004 CO₂ was recorded at 379 ppm, 34% above the background level. Of concern, the increase over the previous year was a record, at almost 3 ppm, just beating the previous record set in 1998. But that earlier record had been attributed to the strong El Niño event of that year. The more recent increase, in the absence of an El Niño, raised eyebrows because it hinted that an ecological feedback between climate change and atmospheric CO₂ levels may be developing. (A feedback is a consequence of an event that in turn changes the cause – in this example, for the worse). Dr. Peter Cox, at the Hadley Centre in the UK speculated that the record increase in atmospheric CO₂ might be related to the 2003 European heat wave. This is thought to have contributed to the death of an abnormally large amount of vegetation, caused additional forest fires, and most invidiously, reduced soil storage of CO₂.

Speculation of ecological feedbacks worsening climate change is not new. In 2000 a team led by Cox suggested that CO₂ levels could rise as high as 980 ppm by the year 2100, because of feedbacks from climate change damaging the terrestrial 'carbon sink' especially the tropical forests, including the Amazon.

So, at the worst case, in the year 2104 the world could have a CO₂ concentration of more than 600 ppm, an average temperature at least 4°C higher than in 1960 and be awash with more floods, droughts, crop failures, hunger and violent conflict. In such a world the WNP would be reduced by far more than 2%; indeed civilisation as we know it would be threatened.

This leads to the third key assumption in the complacent approach to climate change: that a solution can be found just as the problem becomes catastrophic. A medical analogy is that the best way to treat a long predicted viral epidemic would be to build hospitals and to search for a cure when the disease strikes, rather than to invest in developing a vaccine.

In short, climate change remains an important issue, including for development. In the last few months both Japan and the US state of Florida have been struck by repeated storms, and there has also been severe flooding in Bangladesh and Northeast India. Haiti, a country with only 2% forest cover, was particularly vulnerable to and affected by the recent series of Caribbean hurricanes. No one can yet say that these storms are definitely related to climate change, but there is increasing scientific consensus, and – outside the US and Australia – growing political consensus that climate change could become an overwhelming problem for the next generation.

Reducing military spending

This does not mean that issues like the strengthening of health and education systems in developing countries, tackling HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria, maternal mortality, meeting the Millennium Development Goals and so on should be sacrificed in order to tackle climate change. Instead, it would be far better to divert military spending (not only by the US but also by developing countries such as India) towards health and development. This challenge was completely ignored by the Copenhagen Consensus: it was not on their menu.

While technological breakthroughs continue, the capacity of the world to tolerate its human burden has been repeatedly underestimated. Some politicians, corporations and consumers are starting to realize the fundamental dependence of civilisation upon the Earth's human and environmental resources – and that these resources are linked. The scientific literature is bursting with articles about the ways, means and urgency to achieve the sustainability transition. The present could be worse than it is; let us work for a future that is better than it could be.

See website for longer article and references.

Revolving Sheep Bank

It worked!

Early reports from the Phala area of western Tibet confirm the success of the Revolving Sheep Bank. (See photo p. 1.)

The first repayment of fifty female sheep was made last fall, 2003, in Year 4 of the project. They were then loaned to another poor family. The second area in which the Revolving Sheep Bank operates plans to collect the first 50 female sheep this (northern) fall and redistribute them.

Yonden, our employee 'on the ground,' told Prof. Goldstein that a number of nomads told him that this is having more of a positive effect than the government's official poverty alleviation scheme in these areas. We won't have definite data until Prof. Goldstein visits the sites next year. In the meantime, he's submitted a report we've posted on our website (www.bodhi.net.au).

Other news

Colin has four articles in-press. One, in *Public Library of Science Medicine*, a new open-access journal (<http://medicine.plosjournals.org>) discusses population pressure as an underlying factor for genocide and the catastrophic scale of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa; a second is a commentary in *the Lancet* about development, climate change and the Millennium Development Goals (first author Prof. Tony McMichael). Another commentary, about scenario theory, will appear in *EcoHealth*. The fourth article (co-authored with Carlos Corvalan and Prof. Hillel Koren) discusses health and scenarios, to be published in *Ecosystems* early in 2005. Colin also has five book chapters (three with co-authors) slowly nearing publication. See website for details.

Health & human rights in Tibet

Excerpted from Sonal Singh, Lancet 2004; 364: 1009 Department of Medicine, Unity Health System, Rochester, NY, 14626 USA (S Singh MD), ssingh@unityhealth.org. Awaiting reprint permission from the Lancet.

Behind the facade of modernisation since the 1951 invasion by China, 'Tibetans face grim health and human rights realities. Numbers of health workers in the TAR Tibet Autonomous Region) might seem impressive—almost 11,000 health workers and more than 3,000 barefoot doctors (people with 3-6 months' basic health training)—but hospitals lack infrastructure and equipment. One in five city hospitals has no facilities for even simple surgery and there is only one CT scanner in all Tibet. For the 80% of Tibetans who live in the rural hinterlands, medical facilities are scarce, and health workers here rarely have full medical training. Difficulties in transporting patients across long distances and rough terrain mean that many illnesses are left untreated. Where facilities do exist, hospitals may charge anywhere from 1000 Yuan (US\$120) in rural areas to 3000 Yuan (\$360) at urban hospitals as a security deposit—many months' salary for Tibetans.

...
Certainly poverty, and isolation, and altitude in many parts of Tibet – and other rural regions in China – create challenges for the delivery of health care. In addition to these difficulties, However, language barriers, persecution, and torture contribute to the poor health of Tibetans. Around one in five Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala, India, met criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder. Methods of torture reported included electric shocks and suspension in painful positions, beating with iron bars, and setting dogs onto prisoners. China may have invested in the modernisation of Tibet, but affordable and adequate health care is still not available. Beijing's economic policy for the western region of China has focused on large-scale infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, dams, and power stations, whereas health and education have been left wanting. Although there are signs that Beijing is acknowledging the crisis, adequate health care for the Tibetan people will require a change in priorities as well as greater international participation.

References and full text on website.

Thank you

Prof. Chris Barker, NSW, Australia
Prof. Ken Cassman, Nebraska, U.S.A.
Toni Ehrlich, U.S.A.
Jane Hudspeth, Tasmania, Australia
Prof. Hillel Koren, North Carolina, U.S.A.
James Meyers, California, U.S.A.
Luiz Ribeiro, ACT, Australia
Wanda Trimmingham, California, U.S.A.
Prof. Yoland Wadsworth, Vic, Australia
Dr. Annie Whybourne, NT, Australia
Annie Willock & Bart Wisse, Tasmania, Australia

BODHI and Grameen

The BODHI/Grameen partnership begun last year is working well so far. BODHI Australia accepts donations for the Grameen Foundation Australia, which are tax-deductible. The projects for which the funds are intended must meet BODHI's selection criteria. To date, A\$5000 of such funds have been used for the educational project in the Philippines discussed on p. 1.

We need your help

Thanks to your generosity, BODHI has supported many exciting and innovative projects, such as continuing education for remote health workers, literacy (a key to better health) and a micro-credit scheme for Tibetan nomads.

To continue, we need your help. Please send your donation, in U.S. or Australian dollars, to an address below. Contact us for details of direct-debit facilities.

Donations by U.S. and Australian tax-payers are tax-deductible

Founding Patron His Holiness XIV Dalai Lama 1989 Nobel Laureate for Peace

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Dr Denis Wright on

Women and Trafficking

The image you see is not a real one; simply one photograph representing two superimposed extremes: a traditional Indian villager finding herself on the streets of modern Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, with no knowledge of exactly where she is in relation to her homeland, no ability to speak the local language, and neither the money nor the passport to get herself home.

A young woman from a village in Bangladesh may be ensnared in the web of trafficking because of the promise of legitimate work – as a domestic employee, for example – in a large city such as Dhaka, or even in a transnational operation that takes her to India or further abroad. She may willingly agree to the deal in the belief that she and her family will benefit financially from it, but once out of her home village, she may find that she is placed in work that is rightly termed slavery, without the means of escaping from it. Indeed, she may find she has no choice for survival other than to go along with whatever she is ordered to do by her employer, because she has no way of knowing how to get back to her original home. Even if she did, she may be shunned and persecuted by her family on return because of her experience, especially if she has contracted a disease such as AIDS, acquired in performing the real services for which she was trafficked.

The reasons why women cannot seek legitimate work in the way men can are related to the values and norms of the society in which they live. In many traditional societies, women cannot migrate in search of work without being accompanied by men, for the family's honour is at stake. Men may travel comparatively freely across their homeland, and cross international boundaries unchallenged, but women may not. Their only recourse then is to use illegal or pseudo-legal means of travel from one place to another. Therefore, what is called 'trafficking' is more properly to be understood in the context of woman's migration in search of work, and the irony is that the methods imposed by governments to stamp out trafficking often make it harder rather than easier for women to accomplish this. When legitimate travel for unaccompanied women is banned, they have to seek out and use illegal migration routes, and this places them at the mercy of the very people such legislation is designed to attack.

The international dimension to this is one strewn with perils for women. If we take a hypothetical case (but one based on documented fact), a young woman from a Bangladeshi village may go to Dhaka and work legitimately for some time in a garment factory - hard, exacting and demanding work that yields a small but welcome income for her and her family. She learns through sheer necessity about survival in a new city and begins to make a life for herself. Then, through the effects of globalisation of labour which enabled her to acquire this job in the first place, the global market suddenly dries up, and she is out of work.

She will be reluctant to return home, as she will already be under some suspicion in her village because she has been living for months or years in new surroundings unsupervised by her family. Desperate for work, she may be offered employment as a domestic servant in Calcutta – but she is denied legitimate travel opportunities to take it up, and thus needs the cooperation of a trafficking syndicate. Suddenly, she is at the mercy of a system that will end in a brothel in Bombay or with unremitting labour sixteen or more hours a day, seven days a week, at a large house in the new city. Refusing to do such work, she is now an illegal and penniless immigrant in a foreign country, with no-one to help her, facing the full force of the laws she has broken by being trafficked.

She may thus have no choice but to accept whatever work is offered to her, and will enter circumstances that usually to tragedy.

She may, if she is attractive and clever enough, find herself targeted by international traffickers who are aware that she will do anything to escape the morass of the sex industry in India or unrelenting manual or domestic labour. She may



then be recruited by international traffickers as a domestic worker in the Middle East or Hong Kong, given false identity papers and trafficked to one of these destinations. She may be accompanied by men supervising the travel arrangements of other women, Indian and Nepali, who have legitimate passports and who believe that they are going to a country where their wages and conditions will be bearable, and from where they can send money back home.

Some such women do indeed find they have been recruited for legitimate and financially rewarding jobs in places like Saudi Arabia, but all too often they quickly come to learn that their position is at least as bad as that they may have escaped back on the Indian subcontinent, but by which they are imprisoned more than ever. Their employer will have taken their passport for safe keeping, and may well make demands on them for services they cannot refuse, for they are now in a foreign country and with no means of escape. This may also be the fate of women who went willingly on legitimate passports to their new employer. Powerless and cowed, they endure in miserable circumstances where physical and psychological pressures on them are intense.

The point is that the image of the trafficked woman is not really the stereotypical one of the Nepali bride hoodwinked into a sham marriage and then taken off to a brothel in Bombay. This does happen, sadly, and with horrific results, but the reality is that the trafficked woman is more likely to have been forced by circumstances into becoming part of the trafficking network, where, because of the ill-considered laws regarding trafficking, the victim becomes the criminal and the traffickers get off scot-free.

This form of trafficking will continue as long as women are given little or no opportunity to travel freely in search of paid work, regardless of the nature of that work. This is a matter demanding global solutions, for its international dimension ensures that no solution is possible without a global approach to it. Advocacy groups can achieve something by understanding the fundamental nature of the problem and lobbying for effective solutions. They can also provide facilities and money for assistance in rehabilitating the millions of women who have suffered the terrible consequences of trafficking and have been extracted from their plight. But escape means nothing without somewhere to go. International organisations can do a great deal in this regard for the unfortunate victims of human trafficking.

[Note: The definition of a child varies according to circumstances. If a girl is married at 14, is she a child? She certainly acquires on marriage all the responsibilities of a woman. International definitions concerning trafficking make the age of majority 18, yet many of the women trafficked are under that age. In many cases, it is appropriate to treat cases of trafficking of women and children similarly, because the problems they encounter in respect of employment are often identical.]

Dr Denis Wright is taking study leave next year to continue his work in and complete his book on child labour and trafficking in Asia. He has acted as an advisor to the Australian government on child labour in Asia and related issues such as trafficking. He is investigating potential projects for BODHI on the subcontinent.