Training village teachers

Miss Sujata Gautmi, 21, Mr Bais Pati, 45, and 31 other schoolteachers and principals are reaping the benefits of 18 months’ research and effort — as are the 3700 students at Youth Buddhist Society (YBS)-associated schools near the city of Mainpuri in Uttar Pradesh, north-central India. In March, in co-operation with YBS founder Mr Suresh Bauddha, BODHI sent these staff to Loreto College in Kolkata for 11 days’ training.

Sister Cyril of Loreto oversaw the trainees. She writes: ‘We have rarely had such a good and cooperative group. Everyone seemed to take to the training like ducks to water. They have had training only up as far as Class I ... If they come back to us we could do Class II, III and IV and then a little later on the senior school level. We would be very happy to have them back as they were so eager to learn and so ready to take in whatever we could give them.’

In 2009 Colin, Mr Susanta Chakma (founder of SNEHA schools in NE India) and Dr Sari Kovats from the UK visited several of these schools. The boys and girls who attend are mostly the children of poor farmers. The schools are located where state school access is either limited or impossible and are funded by small contributions from parents.

Schools are very simple and sometimes overcrowded. For example, one room may contain two classes, with two teachers in the same room. Many students sit on the floor. The teachers have university degrees but few if any are formally trained as teachers. Their average salary is INR2000 per month; in comparison, state schoolteachers receive INR10,000. There are few reference books.

Sister Cyril and her team conducted the training in Hindi, using classrooms during school sessions as laboratories. Each teacher received a training resource kit. Thanks also to Susanta Chakma, who is generously assisting BODHI throughout the entire organisational process.

Health care in Mongolia

Over tea and momos made by Ven Zasep Tulku in January, Colin and Susan agreed that BODHI’s USD5000 donation (intended for the cancelled Tashi Lhapug Health Care Clinic in Tibet) be used for the new Manlha Institute, which will include a medical clinic, on the southern edge of Ulan Bator. BODHI will pay for the medical doctor’s salary, some medicine and equipment and supplies such as wheelchairs. We will also fund the training of a health-care worker.

Of Mongolia’s 2.7 million people, 1.1 live in Ulan Bator, the capital. Manha will service the urban poor and recent nomadic immigrants from the desert. Primary health care has worsened since Mongolia’s democratic revolution in 1990. In the last few years, a series of natural disasters has caused grazing land to freeze and livestock to starve, forcing tens of thousands of nomads from their traditional homes and way of life. Sprawling ghettos...
A related tension concerns global health security. Does ‘global’ mean health security for the world’s population? Or does it mean health security for the affluent, sought by global surveillance of exotic diseases, resulting in an implicit triage strategy in which infections considered a threat to the affluent are prioritised while those judged as merely likely to contribute to the burden of neglected diseases are largely ignored? My keynote speech focused on such environmental drivers as population, poverty, inequality, climate change and energy (rising oil prices, for instance, drive up food prices).

The burden of disease of emerging infectious diseases (excluding re-emerging infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and dengue fever) is probably outnumbered by that of neglected diseases (eg, hookworm) by at least four orders of magnitude, with one exception: HIV. Even with close attention, an uninformed observer at this meeting would probably not have deduced this.

And by sea

In May I spoke on health in the oceans at the UN Day of Vesak meeting in Bangkok. It is impossible for us to imagine the scale and nature of the ecological riches that have vanished from the ocean and coast. Christopher Columbus in 1493 described the Caribbean, already populated by humans for millennia, as a paradise still rich in natural resources. Our marine riches are rapidly disappearing, even though a few remote coral reefs still possess great colour and diverse life-forms. Yet, the most recent report of the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations found that 85% of wild fish-stocks were either fully or over-exploited. Twelve per cent were ‘moderately’ exploited, leaving only 3% as under-exploited. On the bright side, aquaculture (farmed fish) now supplies almost two-thirds as much fish as caught in the wild.

A root cause of the human assault on the ocean is the growth in human population size, now almost 7 billion and still expanding by 70-80 million annually. This growth in human numbers has been facilitated by both technological innovation and the exploitation of vast supplies of energy removed from Earth’s crust — principally oil, gas, coal and uranium. In turn, innovation and cheap energy are used to detect, catch, freeze and transport food from oceans worldwide, mostly to feed the most affluent quarter of the world’s population.

Cause, economy & the Commons

The oceans are part of an Earth system which is besieged by a mentality, technology and human population with the means to undermine numerous life support systems. A tiny but powerful fraction of the world’s population acts vigorously to obstruct efforts to slow climate change and other aspects of Earth system failure. Meanwhile, corporations such as BP, largely responsible for the 2010 oil-spill in the Gulf of Mexico, are assisted by an acquiescent public. Too few people understand the connectivity of the global system. Thus, when a forest, coral reef or charismatic species is lost, few pay attention — until something we value is lost, right on our own doorstep. It is clearly in our long-term self-interest to develop awareness and to campaign to protect global public goods, such as the climate, energy stocks and fisheries.

One example of this connectivity is piracy in Somalia, a nation whose fisheries collapsed following its government’s failure in 1991. The fisheries of that northeast African nation have been raided repeatedly by foreign fishing fleets, including from Europe. Foreign raiders displaced much of the local, less capital-intensive industry, worsening Somali poverty, costing livelihoods and robbing locally available marine protein. This conjunction of events is a highly plausible driver for the great increase in piracy, most of which is perpetrated by Somali fishermen. Piracy, kidnapping and ransoms that target comparatively wealthy boats off the Somali coast have received much more attention than the earlier piracy, whose victims were poor Somalis.

The Tragedy of the Commons was first advanced in 1968 by Garrett Hardin, who pointed out that common resources have been protected by the means to undermine numerous life support systems. A tiny but powerful fraction of the world’s population acts vigorously to obstruct efforts to slow climate change and other aspects of Earth system failure. Meanwhile, corporations such as BP, largely responsible for the 2010 oil-spill in the Gulf of Mexico, are assisted by an acquiescent public. Too few people understand the connectivity of the global system. Thus, when a forest, coral reef or charismatic species is lost, few pay attention — until something we value is lost, right on our own doorstep. It is clearly in our long-term self-interest to develop awareness and to campaign to protect global public goods, such as the climate, energy stocks and fisheries.

One example of this connectivity is piracy in Somalia, a nation whose fisheries collapsed following its government’s failure in 1991. The fisheries of that northeast African nation have been raided repeatedly by foreign fishing fleets, including from Europe. Foreign raiders displaced much of the local, less capital-intensive industry, worsening Somali poverty, costing livelihoods and robbing locally available marine protein. This conjunction of events is a highly plausible driver for the great increase in piracy, most of which is perpetrated by Somali fishermen. Piracy, kidnapping and ransoms that target comparatively wealthy boats off the Somali coast have received much more attention than the earlier piracy, whose victims were poor Somalis.

The Tragedy of the Commons was first advanced concerning the oceans. Pessimistic formulations of this theory considered resources to be vulnerable because they could not be fenced. Consequently, it served the self-interest of the most aggressive and earliest to raid marine and other common resources, whether piscine, atmospheric or fossil energy. To hold back was to risk a competitor appropriating an unfair share of the resource. There is much evidence to support this tragedy. However, critics of the Commons pointed out that common resources have been protected by good governance. We are in a race against time, in which institutions (cultures, laws, human practices) to protect such common riches must evolve lest all wealth be lost.

Full articles & references available upon request
In the last year we’ve introduced scholarships for urban and rural schoolgirls in Bangladesh in Denis Wright’s name. Mrs Tahsina Ahmad’s recommendations for recipients included both Moanoghar Mountain Home in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and Underprivileged Children’s Education Program (UCEP) in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

BODHI Community Adviser Ms Kabita Chakma presented the inaugural Denis Wright Scholarships for Academic Excellence and Academic Improvement (USD 500 & USD 250 respectively) at Moanoghar on 29 January, 2011. The scholarship for Academic Inspiration (USD 70) was added and awarded later. Thanks also to Brig Gen Aftab Uddin Ahmad at UCEP and Kirit Nishan Chakma & all at Moanoghar.

Academic Excellence. Runi Chakma, Class IX. Her JSC exams results topped the school. She performs well in drama and is a Girls’ Guide.

Academic Improvement. Riya Chakma, Class VIII. She has overcome personal tragedy to achieve excellent exams results. She sings and dances well and is a Girls’ Guide.

Academic Inspiration. Circumstances prevented 12-year-old Shovarani Chakma from sitting her last exams, and she was distraught. She wants to become a doctor and is already studying science.

Underprivileged Female Working Children in Bangladesh

UCEP works with Bangladesh’s most marginalised children: street children, those from minority groups or with disabilities and those forced to leave formal education to work in hazardous conditions.

Kohinur Akter received the inaugural scholarship of USD 982 at an award ceremony in December, 2010. She is 16 years old and has been working as a domestic helper. She lives in a rented tin shed in Dhaka with her family. Kohinur began her nurses’ aide training in January, 2011 and dreams of becoming a professional nurse one day.

In her acceptance speech Kohinur says, ‘I want to assure all of you that I will move ahead, win poverty and contribute to the development of the country with the inspiration, support and cooperation you have provided me through this scholarship. I hope this cooperation will be continued and like before, you will guide me in my way to success. I express my gratitude and thank you all.’ Full speech on website.

Health promotion & traditional healers

Drama conveys messages. On January 5, 2011, BODHI’s local partner Green Tara Trust held a mass health promotional event in the remote Tamang community of Bhandarkharka, Nepal. This was funded in the memory of our friend Jim Meyers by his loved ones. Artists performed a play with messages about the importance of washing hands and using post-natal care for infants. They dramatised a drunken husband quarrelling with and beating his wife, discussed the dangers of smoking during pregnancy and showed how husbands can care for pregnant women.

Reaching out to traditional healers. In December 2009, Green Tara Trust held a 4-day refresher/training course for 11 traditional healers (THs) at Manmohan Memorial Community Hospital, Parping in a remote part of the Kathmandu Valley. They provided certificates and identity cards to the participants, as well as health promotion kits with posters, toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap and nail clippers.

People whom they serve have faith in THs and their ways of treating disease. Most THs don’t know about modern health services, as their relationship with modern health workers is still developing, nor do they tend to refer patients.

Other training objectives were to
• enhance THs as health promoters and communicators, &
• promote maternal, neonatal and child health through THs

We greatly value your support and keep our mailing list confidential

Printed on 100% recycled paper
In the land of pagodas
Searching for lost clans

In his attempts to preserve Jumma culture, BODHI adviser Kulottam Chakma travelled from Australia to Burma in January seeking inaccessible Chakma communities. Chakmas belong to the broader grouping of Jumma, or indigenous Bangladeshi people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Here is an extract from his ground-breaking trip report.

Mejelegung. On 26 January 2011, I went back to Nankya and with my first boat took the other group of Chakmas to Mejelegung, a village near Lappangung. It had more than 100 households. There was another Chakma village east of Mejelegung and on the foothills of Rakhine Yoma. Just like in Nankya, the villagers gathered in the front yard of a house. The villagers are mainly farmers. We had discussion on various issues like where they sell their farm produce and what their total population was in Rakhine state.

They have only one university graduate in the whole village and he is unemployed. On population they told me, a retired Chakma officer of the Burmese Army conducted an internal census in 1996 and the number returned 60,000. That number is now likely to be at least 80,000. I saw many children in every Chakma village I visited. [Editor’s comment: the high birth rate reflects poverty, which it also helps to strengthen.]

Religious conviction forbids Rakhines and Chakmas from fishing or hunting. The Lemro originates in China and its mouth is at the bay east of Sittwe. After about 45 minutes’ boat ride we stopped at a village named Mejelegung.

Lappangung. Lappangung is on the bank of the Len and halfway between Mejelegung and Nankya. The village had 60 households. The villagers are mainly farmers. We had similar conversation like at Mejelegung. I was very amazed by the fact that we could still speak in the same language after many centuries of separation. However, there are some differences between our and their vocabularies. I was careful not to use Bengali words while speaking with them. They still use original Chakma words in numbering system. For example the number 21 is kuri ek not ekush, 96 is nobboi chhoi not chhia nobboi. Education is agar not lega-para. Village is ruva not adaam.

Making a donation

Please fill out and return

Name ____________________________________________________________________

Address ____________________________________________________________________

City State Postal Code

Telephone ______________________________ Email __________________________

Enclosed is __$30 __$50 __$100 __$500 __$1000 __$2000 __$5000 __Other

For Australian cheques to be tax-deductible, they must be made out to BODHI Australia Overseas Relief Fund. U.S. checks are tax-deductible.

May we use your name, state and country only in the Thank You section of our newsletter? ___ Yes ___ No

Direct transfer and direct debit

BSB 807009
Account No. 51326099
Please put your name in Reference Line

Paying by credit card

Please enter your Visa, MasterCard or American Express number, expiry date and signature below.

Either return to BODHI, UG01/86 Northbourne Ave, Braddon ACT 2612 Australia
Or
2743 Portobello Drive, Torrance, CA 90505-7309 U.S.A.
OR Email your details to csbutler@sctelco.net.au

All credit card donations are tax-deductible

Visa and MasterCard

□□□□ □□□□ □□□□ □□□□ Exp date □□□□

AMEX

□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□ Exp date □□□□

AMEX Security Code:

AMEX users: We pay only a non-profit merchant fee and we absorb it: you don’t pay anything.

Type of credit card Name on credit card (please print) Signature

BODHI Times 40, June 2011