

BODHI TIMES

Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI)

December, 2001

No. 21

Refugee health in microcosm

BODHI Mass Health Awareness Campaign

BODHI has been working for many years to improve refugee health sustainably. Our latest project provides A\$3000/US\$1500 to improve health through health education at the 22 villages, 6 monasteries, 1 nunnery and 5 schools in Bylakuppe Tibetan settlement near Mysore in South India. Approximately 15,000 Tibetans and the same number of Indians will benefit directly. The following is taken from a proposal by Tenpa TK, BODHI's representative in India formerly based in Mundgod. We're still ironing out the details as this goes to press.

The need for preventive medicine is especially acute in a refugee community. Empowering the general public to protect themselves from disease and infection by creating awareness of health problems through health education is crucial to resolve existing health problems and prevent future ones. People need to understand that prevention is cheaper than cure. To spread this message and create health awareness, the team will go from village to village, school to school and monastery to monastery in Lugum Samdupling and Dickey Larsoe, the settlements comprising Bylakuppe.

People will learn more about the most dangerous, common diseases, how to prevent them and how to seek early and proper treatment. The team will also emphasise: 1) adopting healthy habits; 2) changing attitudes towards health activities and some dangerous traditional rituals and practices; 3) instilling a sense of shared responsibility for building a healthy society by including them in the team's efforts to build a better future for themselves and their children; 4) the importance of immunisations and vaccinations; and 5) the importance of protecting the environment.

Lugsum Samdupling Tibetan Settlement was established in 1960 for 5000 (now 8500) people, who were supposed to feed themselves from farm produce. The land's productivity has gradually deteriorated. There was no hospital early on and the basic



From rabies and anti-smoking health education brochures.
Tibetan Dept of Health, Dharamsala, India

health infrastructure is still poor. Low income, overcrowding, poor sanitation, illiteracy and frequent migration has brought many major health problems to the community. Consequently, many have died at a very young age. Contagious diseases and diseases of poor hygiene are very common.

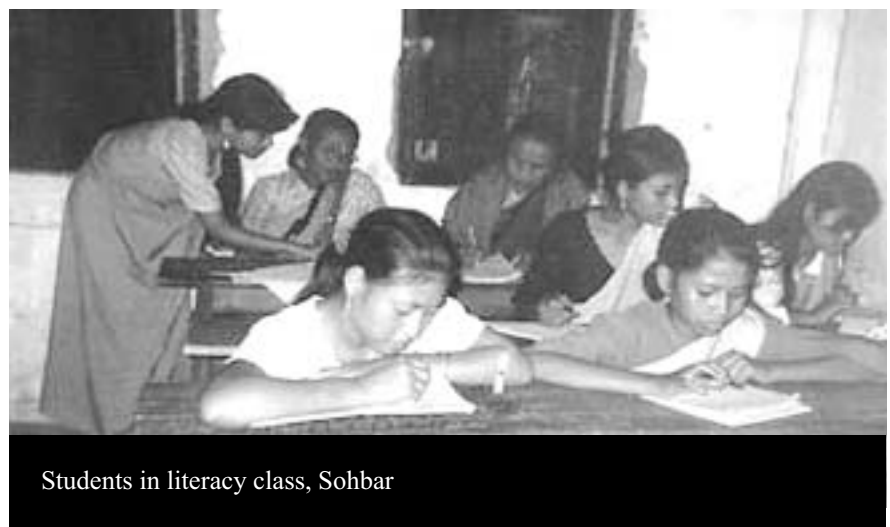
The situation is the same at Dickey Larsoe, originally intended for 3,000 people, now home

to 6,000. Common in the residential schools (with more than 1,000 students) and monasteries are such illnesses as TB, upper respiratory tract infections (URTIs), Hepatitis B and skin infections. The closest referral centre is Mysore, 60 miles/100 kms away.

The main health-educational activities will be carried out at a grassroots level, involving lecture sessions, printed hand-outs and posters and video shows.

The project will reach 22 villages, 6 monasteries, 1 nunnery and 5 schools. Health talks and education materials cover the following subjects: HIV/AIDS, drug addiction and substances abuse, rabies/dog bites, snake bites, TB, URTIs, Hepatitis B, mental disorders and gastro-enteritis.

"The project needs to start as soon as possible. Most of the infected are either children or the group at their most productive age, the bread-earners of their families," Tenpa says.



Students in literacy class, Sohbar

Courtesy Dr Hallel Ghonglah via email

Project Update: Adult Literacy in India

Dr Ghonglah writes from Sohbar: 'The work is gaining momentum beyond expectations. We have taken in 36 students, mostly women. Many children who cannot afford to go to school during the day are coming. We have decided not to take them since this will incur more teachers and they demand to be taught English, maths etc. We're afraid it will go beyond a literacy class into a typical school. We also teach hygiene, public health, environment and agriculture.'

National security & the Cornucopian enchantment

If Paul Ehrlich can be regarded as the quintessential neo-Malthusian of recent times, then the late Julian Simon was surely the leading anti-Malthusian, arguing that no limits at all existed to human carrying capacity. Simon claimed that humans were “an ultimate resource,” able to “bootstrap” their own escape from poverty. His arguments, together with a shift towards user-pays philosophy, contributed to both reduced US family planning assistance and global reduction in foreign aid.

Simon's views also appear to have influenced the African Academy of Sciences, which argued in 1993: “Whether or not the Earth is finite will depend on the extent to which science and technology is able to transform the resources available for humanity. There is only one earth—yes, but the potential for transforming it is not necessarily finite.” Lawrence Summers, US Treasury Under Secretary in the Clinton administration, held a similar opinion. While working as a senior economist for the World Bank, he claimed: “There are no ... limits to the carrying capacity of the earth that are likely to bind any time in the foreseeable future. There isn't a risk of an apocalypse due to global warming or anything else. The idea that we should put limits on growth, because of some natural limit, is a profound error and one that, were it ever to prove influential, would have staggering social costs.”

Modern demographers have rejected the laissez faire extremism exemplified by Simon, but nonetheless appear to have been influenced by his optimism, perhaps due to the lucrative nature of a less confrontational position. For example, Paul Demeny, editor of the *Population and Development Review*, published a long article in 1988 discussing the Limits to Growth debate. He described a well-known children's riddle, originally used to illustrate the concept of exponential growth and later to warn of human over-population. Demeny asked: “How is it to be ascertained that we are on the 29th day and face the last chance “to save the pond?” On what basis can we discard the conjecture that the present corresponds, say, to the 24th day, when the global pond would be 1/64th full?”

Supporting Demeny's scepticism is the fact that some of the fears expressed in the original Limits to Growth debate were recognised as overstated. On the other hand, Norman Borlaug, when awarded the Nobel Prize in 1970 for his role in fostering the Green Revolution, warned that this would only provide a little time. Vitousek et al's argument that further doubling of the human appropriation of terrestrial photosynthesis was unlikely had also appeared two years prior to Demeny's paper.

Though rarely surfacing visibly, recognition of limited human carrying capacity also exists in conservative politics. Both Virginia Abernethy and George Kennan used carrying-capacity arguments to lobby against foreign aid by and immigration to the US, other than to maintain US zero population growth. These policies have now become mainstream; the underlying carrying-capacity rationale remains tacit.

The extremist taint that clouds the carrying-capacity discussion has inhibited consideration of the role of “overpopulation” and resource scarcity by most analysts of the Rwandan genocide, who instead attribute primary causation to ethnic hatred. Maurice King argues that a taboo prevents explicit discussion of carrying capacity by UNICEF and the US State Department. King's views have been severely criticised and even misrepresented, including by writers arguing that such discussions are code for infanticide.

Is discussion of carrying capacity pointless?

Critics may ask whether examination of refugees, war and environmental degradation in terms of carrying capacity is more useful than scolding naughty children. Such views risk justifying selfish behaviour by “full” countries and victim-blaming in “overpopulated” ones. This risk must be taken if we are to prevent ongoing and future conflict, environmental change and human refugees. As King says, it is better to have benign than malignant uproar.

The benefits of limiting population growth were better recognised in the early post-WWII decades than today. Though scarred by the Cold War, many populations adopted at least the rhetoric of reducing global inequality. Advocacy of reduced population growth rates united the South and the North and radical and conservative politicians. For example George Bush, Senior wrote in 1973 (when the annual population global increase was nearly 80 million per annum, as it still is): “In a world of nearly 4 billion people ... [with] major world problems like population and environmental protection ... Success in the population field, under United Nations leadership, may, in turn, determine whether we can resolve successfully the other great problems of peace, prosperity, and individual rights that face the world.”

Though Mao initially spoke against family planning, by the late 1950s Chou En-Lai advocated accelerated demographic transition in China. Subsequent decades saw ambitious Chinese family planning targets. Today, China's population is far lower than it might have been. This resulted in part from forced sterilisation and was undoubtedly bought at a substantial human rights cost. Would not

the terrible human rights abuse of many in the South in recent decades, especially in Africa, have been less had their birth rates been lower?

Increasing wealth, education, contraceptive availability and the media all foster smaller family size more humanely than does coercion. Much of the responsibility for the comparatively slow rate of demographic transition in Africa lies with the selfish trade, aid and debt policies that high-income countries have followed in recent decades. We in the rich countries have a significant responsibility for this.

Self-interest and carrying capacity

The powerful act to protect or improve their perceived security. But gross inequality, which the futile US strategic missile defence program exemplifies, is also a clear cause of the current anti-US terrorism campaign. Greenhouse gas emissions in the South, though still low on a per capita basis, also pose a major future security threat to the North.

Northern policy makers, enchanted by the Cornucopian mirage presented by Simon and his supporters (such as Bjørn Lomborg), have recently exhibited a general indifference to both the reality of the global environmental crisis and the eventual size of populations in the South. This has resulted in low-income populations possessing a strategic lever that, at best, could force wealthy populations to adopt a less exploitative position.

What can be done? Climate change and other erosions of global public goods (including international justice) could be recognised as global security threats. The North could resurrect some of its post-WWII policies and rhetoric, expressed for example by the emerging UN institutions, and recognise that a world with reduced national and international inequality is likely to be both safer and more humane. Such policies could aim to dramatically accelerate the sustainability transition. At best, this may engage and inspire the world's youth and create hope. Franker discussion of the limits to regional and global carrying capacity is vital to the success of such a campaign.

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair hints at a recognition that a fairer world is safer, but has not stopped British forces bombing Afghans; new US Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill warns repeatedly that climate change threatens civilisation, but so did Al Gore; and former Australian prime minister Paul Keating has warned that Australia's hard-line anti-refugee policy buys short-term popularity but long-term risk. Some leaders are waking up, but there is a long way to go.

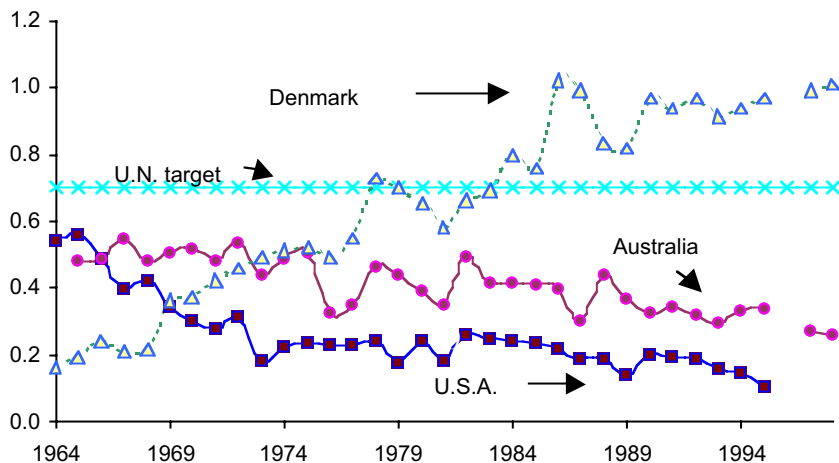
References on request; see also website.

Year 2 'perfect'

Revolving Sheep Bank

The second phase of 200 sheep/goats were distributed to four new poor nomad families this August. All went perfect, Yonden said. The report should follow soon.

Foreign Aid: 1964-1998



Official foreign aid from many wealthy countries has declined substantially in recent years, as a percentage of the total economy. Only four countries—Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands—exceed the UN recommended level of 0.7%. Data: OECD.

News

Monastic CHWs. *Tibetan Health* (April-June 2001, Vol 15:2) reports that health workers from various monasteries around India have completed a three-month basic community health worker (CHW) course at Delek Hospital, Dharamsala. Some of you may remember that BODHI made this proposal in 1992 but was unable to find support among the refugee monastic community, other than Venerable Tenzin Wangchuk.

Acting locally

Fundraising is our biggest area of need. We're grateful to the following.

Tasmanian BODHI evening. Paul Thomas' Rugs of Tibet and the Australia Tibet Council co-sponsored An Evening with BODHI in Hobart in August. Colin and Susan showed slides and a video and answered questions. Senator Bob Brown was present during the very pleasant evening.

Northern California, USA. Dr Marty Rubin will hold a fundraising event, \$2002 in 2002, in Northern California next (northern) spring. Details to follow.

North Queensland, Australia. Bryan West plans a fundraising event early next year where vocational education students hold a restaurant in Charters Towers. He'll precede this event with a hangi, a South Seas barbecue in which the oven is buried in sand.

Thank you ...

... to some supporters

The Honourable **Dick Adams'** office staff and **Dee Alty** for her ongoing support and advice.

Malcolm Dick

Assembling a travelling slide show & other help.

Jane Hudspeth

Loyal help over the years.

Scotty Marshall of the Tasmanian Community Foundation, for advice and support.

Richard Patterson

Obtaining a video of the work of Professor Goldstein and Dr Beall in Tibet and donating garage-sales proceeds to BODHI.

We need your help

Thanks to your generosity, BODHI has supported numerous exciting and innovative projects. Current examples include continuing education for remote health workers, adult literacy—a key to better health—and a micro-credit scheme working with Tibetan nomads called the Revolving Sheep Bank.

In order to continue, we need your support. Please send your donation, payable in US or Australian dollars, to an address below.

US donations tax-deductible

Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI) aims to find sustainable ways to improve health, education and the environment in low-income countries, which we feel is achievable by providing a hook, not a fish.

BODHI Times is the biennial newsletter of Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI).

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We greatly value your support and keep our mailing list confidential

We present three viewpoints on terrorism against the West and invite your response. The first two items are letters to the Lancet.

US as benefactor

Lancet: Vol 358 • October 20, 2001 p 1365

Sir—I congratulate you on an extraordinarily well-articulated treatise on the terrorist acts that have so shaken all of us.¹

You, of course, cannot answer the question of what the USA has done to warrant this intense antipathy; why does it have this persona of evil, when one can recite ad nauseum all the good that has been done by this country for the world in general and for poorer nations in particular?

In the eyes of a segment of the world, there is an ulterior US motive for this philanthropy. Even so, it is quite apparent that a quid pro quo for these good deeds has been practically non-existent. It will be tragic but understandable if we get tired

of our continuing unrequited good deeds, and no longer hasten to support grief and desolation in the rest of the world by pouring in our resources when the next natural or man-made calamity strikes.

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1 Editorial, 'A world war against terrorism,' *Lancet* 2001; 358: 937.

Why so many hate the US

Lancet: Vol 358 • October 20, 2001 p 1366

Sir—I was disappointed by your comments on global terrorism.¹

Appropriately, you ask why so much hatred has built up against the USA. But you avoid answering your question. Strikingly, you omit any comment on the extent and role of global inequality;² the most likely reason for the durable and pervasive anti-US attitude that you admit now exists in many parts of the non-western world. Additionally, your claim that the USA now seeks international engagement ignores its current self-interest in so doing, and makes obscure the US policy consistent with the converse conclusion.

There are many examples: they include the US behaviour at the Durban antiracism conference, its rejection of the biological weapons convention protocol, its selective interpretation of international law, its attitude

towards the possible fate of less-developed countries affected by global warming, and its miserly foreign aid budget. You seem to suggest that, although the assault on the USA should be utterly condemned, it cannot be understood. The manner and scale of the assault was highly dramatic, but the annual toll from terrorism in more-developed countries remains numerically trivial compared with that from poverty in any year in less-developed countries. The death and suffering in poor countries is, however, scarcely acknowledged by the general western public, especially in the USA, unsurprising given the self-absorption of most US media.

Unfortunately, your assessment that far worse threats—biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons of mass destruction—may soon be at hand now seems increasingly plausible. The economic, insurance, political, social, and

3 views

The real enemy

psychological structures of western populations might survive a single attack from these weapons, but the cumulative harm to global civilisation from a series of such attacks would be immense.

Climate change, the still growing population in the South, and frustration heightened by an increasingly obvious virtual abundance that, for billions, remains unrealisable, warn that the security threats in the current century may dwarf the past.

We may be lucky: those dangers might prove overstated. However, the apparent risk in the present and near-future resembles, without exaggeration, the nuclear brinkmanship that characterised the most frightening period of the Cold War.^{2,3}

Glib claims of the alleged power of globalisation to bring wealth for all⁴ instead show the failure of dominant development and economic theory. Wealthy populations must urgently do all they can to accelerate the demographic and sustainability transitions,⁵ thus giving real hope to the people of the South. This warrants the highest strategic priority.

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National University, Canberra, ACT 0200,
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1 Editorial, 'A world war against terrorism,' *Lancet* 2001; 358: 937.

2 Butler CD, 'Inequality, global change and the sustainability of civilisation,' *Global Change Hum*

Health 2000; 1: 156–72.

3 Kennedy RF, *Thirteen days: a memoir of the Cuban missile crisis*. New York: WW Norton, 1969.

4 Feachem RGA, 'Globalisation is good for your health, mostly,' *BMJ* 2001, 323: 504–06.

5 McMichael AJ, Smith KR, Corvalan CF, 'The sustainability transition: a new challenge,' *Bull World Health Organ* 2000; 78: 1067.

Is it really suicide?

Immediately following the horrific events of 11 September, I was asked to give a talk on Islam on Sydney radio. Shortly after, I received a letter from a listener asking me about the paradox whereby a Muslim could engage in a suicide mission and yet believe that he would enter Heaven, when there are clear injunctions in Islamic teachings against suicide.

The question seemed to me to be an important one, so I consulted various translations of the Qur'an to see what was said there about suicide. In fact, almost nothing was said, and what was there was not translated consistently at all.

For example, one source says quite clearly that the translation of one line in the Qur'an (4:29) is as follows:

"...and do not kill yourselves (nor kill one another)."

Yet in other translations, these same words in the Arabic are interpreted as follows:

"and do not kill your people;"

The difference is quite considerable. Whether you translate the line as a comment on suicide or not depends on the version you are willing to accept. Actually, the sentence is in the context of not spending money on wasteful luxuries, as they can kill or destroy you. So the Qur'an as translated into English is not entirely clear on this matter, and from the variety in translation, the original is open to more than one interpretation as well.

However, there are many hadiths which are very explicitly against suicide. Hadiths are based on the life of Muhammad and later Caliphs, so are an important guide for Muslims. This still left me with the original question.

I think that the reasoning of these men must go something like this: that they do not wish for death and so are not suicides - they wish for life but perform these actions, as on a battlefield, knowing that it will, in all likelihood, end in their deaths. The difference is a subtle one, but obviously it is enough to be made consistent with the expectation of the martyr killed on the battlefield to enter Paradise.

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