



Dr Gilles Rohan

Minutes, Annual General Meeting
BODHI Australia, Inc
Canberra, ACT, 14 June 2009

Meeting opened: 14.00

Present physically: Graham Ranft, Kulottam Chakma, Dr Gilles Rohan, Susan Butler, A/Prof Colin Butler

Present via email: Jane Hudspeth, Dr Denis Wright

Apologies: Caroline Ralston/Nagasuri, Luiz Ribeiro, Emilia Della Torre, Jo O'Sullivan, Kabita Chakma

Minutes of last meeting: Presented as read, Minutes accepted: nominated by Kulottam Chakma, seconded by Susan Butler

Business arising from minutes of last meeting. Brief discussion of the following:

1. Project strategy. Build on what we've got. Wary of branching out too much. Good not to have unsolicited requests. More in President's Report

ACTION: Good policy to be wary, as we've been getting lots more unsolicited requests for funds this year, through the website, some of which are attractive, eg a proposal from the Thai/Burmese border, and another from Ghana.

2. Growth strategy: employ someone? Employed Susan for \$250 per month. Colin suggested a raise at some point.
3. Proposed Mizoram Health Project. Dr Bhagadatta Chakma invited to join the newly formed Mizoram Health Committee

ACTION: Dr Chakma joined the committee the next day

ACTION: BODHI decided to work with Chakma Mahila Samity (CMS) after all, despite difficulties accessing the Internet, opening bank accounts, speaking English, etc. Subsequently, CMS held two health awareness/mobile medical camps. There has been no word from Dilip despite attempts at communication

4. Potential Projects.

- a. Mobile medical clinics in remote areas of CHT, Bangladesh

ACTION: just getting under way with donation just under A\$4,000

- b. School run by Dr Ko Tar, Burma

ACTION: Underway with US\$2,000 donation

5. Tim Smith, Alison Wild & Dilip Chakma unable to participate in Mizoram projects: other commitments

6. Kulottam to provide DVD on financial situation for Chakma people.

ACTION: He has it but not in English

Presentations by attendee

Mr Kulottam Chakma to discuss UN's employment of Bangladeshi soldiers in peace-keeping missions in Africa; Mizoram health project; and PBM, SKS and Sneha.

Kulottam Chakma mentioned that he may be able to visit Rangoon and see Dr Ko Tar.

Presentation by Kulottam. He outlined the situation of Jummas in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), also in Northeast India and Myanmar. He described how in Bangladesh the Chakmas are comparatively poor (i.e., compared with most other Bangladeshis). He described other logistic

problems, eg restricted access to CHT by other Bangladeshi people. The CHT occupies about 10% of the land area of Bangladesh, and he outlined the loss of land due to construction of the Kaptai Dam; the comparative persecution of from Pakistani government at that time; and acceptance of refugees by Nehru in the sensitive border state of Arunachal Pradesh.

Chakmas also have limited political leverage in 3 states of NE India, eg 80,000 people in Arunachal Pradesh, who migrated there as refugees 40 years ago. In Mizoram (inhabited mainly by Mizors), there is discrimination against Chakma minority; Susan then mentioned contact with the NGO CMS in Mizoram, a woman's group; estimated literacy rate of Chakmas in Mizoram is about 30% (Mizors by contrast are very literate) .. they are mainly subsistence farmers.

In Tripura the 60,000 Chakmas are better off, with more rights, their literacy rate is about 70%

Discussion then of the Chakma school SKS in Kolkata, established by a Buddhist monk exiled from Bangladesh – 5-600 students for students PIRTEK or PIRTEH – an NGO based in France, who assisted SKS until about 2000; until then tuition was free; but they were then forced to introduce fees in response – so now the school community is a mix of subsidised and full fee-paying students

Susan noted SKS's lack of communication – with prompting they do acknowledge receipt of funds but never provide any accounting of what happens to those funds. She further noted that the funds BODHI donates to SKS are provided by the Australian Jumma community (Jumma being the collective name for the 12 or so indigenous groups in the CHT). However there was discussion over whether SKS really warranted additional support from BODHI. Kulottam reminded the meeting that he has twice visited SKS (2003, 2008), located near the recently built freeway between Kolkata and the airport. Due to the proximity of this road, the land around and on which SKS has been built has become much more valuable. Because SKS now seems to be standing more on its feet, SKS may be lower priority for BODHI.

There was then a brief discussion of PBM, in the CHT, which used to provide regular mobile medical clinics. Kulottam visited PBM in April 2008; he met the director, who promised to send BODHI reports; alas, 15 months later they have not been received.

Brief discussion of Moanaghar school

Presentation of reports:

President's report

As in report, brief discussion of Tibet Office in Canberra proposal, which is unlikely to proceed (lack of their understanding)

Demonstration of BODHI database

Discussion of Mitini Nepal and Green Tara Trust, including support for Dr Jane Stephens

Jamseng – discussion re background of Ven Zazep Tulku; discussion re problems of supporting Tashi Lhapug project in Tibet; especially because of Ven Zazep Tulku's recent problems obtaining a visa for China; the funds for that may now be transferred to support the Jamseng project.

Discussion of two Pune projects

Discussion of Mizoram project. BODHI sent A\$550 with no explicit advice other than a request to spend it on health. In response, CMA held a well-documented (by photos, now on web) health clinic; there was additional information provided, but much of this was lost at our end, due to computer website re-organisation. Resending of the report has been requested.

Discussion of Moahangar (“mountain home”) mobile medical clinic, in Rangamati, CHT. BODHI is about to send them \$4,000. Kulottam expressed confidence in Nishan who works for DANIDA, and who is acting as our intermediary. (Nishan was kidnapped in the last two years.)

There was then a discussion of the revamping of the BODHI website, via Graphic Ark, a graphic design company based in Fyshwyck, Canberra, and additional software purchases (see her report). Colin expressed concerned that costs for the website be restricted. Susan replied that Graphic Ark had promised to charge no more than \$1,000 at this stage. Colin asked Susan to get confirmation in writing from them. Colin pointed out that expenses could rise in absolute terms, but that the fraction of income expended on non-project incomes should be restrained, if possible.

Director of Electronic Communications Report

Denis’s report was read by Susan

Treasurer’s Report

There was discussion about the timing of the AGM, Colin explained that having it in June allowed sufficient time for the financial details for the previous calendar year to be completed and audited. There is a legal requirement to hold the AGM by June 30 each year.

There was a discussion of how the funds could be spent and the general caution that while funds are hard to raise they are also hard to spend well. While some projects can be expanded there is a risk of doing it too rapidly, exceeding the “absorptive capacity” of the recipient and risking temptation and corruption.

Medical Director’s Report

Demonstration of BODHI page on Facebook

Discussion of absorptive capacity: Pune projects and Sneha appear ok because of our contacts who oversee; the Burma project may be questionable due to logistics.

In Delhi in August Colin will try to visit Susanta Chakma (Sneha) in addition to the Youth Buddhist Society in Mainpuri, including about sending Israeli volunteers to work with them. Colin will spend half a day seeing patients as well.

Kulottam commented that he would circulate within the Chakma community for feedback about the Sneha school.

General business

Maybe a bit more funds to CMS Mizoram; maybe a bit less to SKS

Maybe a bit to Moanaghar – Nishan more reliable and energetic

Graeme asked a question about the transfer of funds, and in particular whether corrupt local government or bank officials skim some of the donation. There was then discussion of difficulties with banks, but there is no government corruption we know of. There can be problems however with funds not being spent quickly or well.

Discussion re Western Union – which charges \$25 for amounts less than \$500, if done over the Internet. However, Susan cannot cope with additional extra financial workload. In any case the local Australian bank (Bendigo) waives charges.

There was then a discussion re the appropriateness of training for health workers in Mizoram, generated by an inquiry from the president of CMS about BODHI sponsoring the medical education in Australia of someone from Mizoram. There was consensus that bringing someone to Australia was not cost effective, but there was a cautious view that a local candidate, if of sufficient promise, and if recommended by the community, – eg 3-month training in Kolkata, for locals assessed as likely to return.

Election of office bearers: unchanged

President. Susan Woldenberg Butler
Vice-President. Jane Hudspeth
Secretary. Denis Wright
Treasurer. Colin Butler

Selection of General Committee members: Luiz Ribeiro, Dr Shanti Raman, Kabita Chakma, Kulottam Chakma and Emilia Della Torre

Appointment of auditor: unchanged: Greg Harper, Cameron's

Date of next AGM: TBA

Meeting closed: 1600 Attendees were thanked for coming, and for their support