



WE HAVE MANAGED TO SUPPORT

a total of about **9,000** people
distributing altogether **34,620** kg of tsampa
4,742 Kg of butter
blankets, tents, beds and essential goods.

THANK YOU ALL!

WE ARE NOT GOING
TO STOP NOW

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Head of ASIA's project in Nepal



LEADING STORIES

Earthquake Emergency A Report on what has been done

Last April 14 a violent earthquake struck the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Yushu, killing more than 2,000 people, injuring more than 12,000 and leaving about 100,000 homeless or without anything.

After the main tremor of 7.1° on the Richter scale, registered at 7.49 in the morning at Jiegu, another 700 aftershocks literally destroyed the town and reduced it to a pile of rubble.

70% of the schools (192 in all) cannot be used, the only existing hospital has collapsed as have 60% of the Buddhist monasteries in the region including *Gyanak Mani*, the temple with the largest collection of *mani* (stones with prayers that have been carved by hand) in the world, more than two billion, eight stupas and prayer wheels that are 10 metres high.

The Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Yushu

Yushu Prefecture is prevalently populated by Tibetans who are ethnic Khampas. It is situated at the centre of a vast nomadic area in East Tibet at an average height of 4,000 metres above sea level. The plateaus in the western part from where three of the major rivers of Asia originate, the Yellow River, the Yangtze River and the Mekong River, are over 5,000 m.

There is extreme poverty in this area due to the orographic conditions of the territory as well as the fact that it is prevalently populated by nomadic peoples. In 2003/2004, at the request of local people, ASIA set up an Emergency Project, financed by the Italian Presidenza del Consiglio with proceeds from the government, for the struggle against famine and to help the Tibetan nomadic tribes to reach economic self-sufficiency.

The name of the capital of the prefecture in which the earthquake took place is Jyekundo in Tibetan, frequently abbreviated to Jyegu. The name comes from the contraction of “Kyelwa gu” and has different meanings. One of them is etymological: “Kyelwa gu” means “nine lives” and indicates that if one lives a life on this sacred and wonderful land it is equivalent to nine lives lived elsewhere.

Yushu, the name of the region in which Jyekundo is situated, comes from the Tibetan “yul shu” which literally means “vestigial land” from the epic poem about King Gesar. Yulshul was the land where King Gesar’s beautiful wife, queen Singcham Drugmo, was born, and where her father, Ga Tempa Gyaltzen, ruled. Due to this link with Gesar’s queen, *Drungmo*, the women of Yushu are famous for being beautiful and regal.

Another meaning has to do with the geographical position: the suffix “do” indicates that the place is situated at the meeting point of two rivers (just like Chamdo, Dhartsedo etc.), the Dza-chu and the Peltang-chu. A wider geographical term for the whole territory is Kham-toe, or northern Kham.

What actions has ASIA taken?

As soon as ASIA received news about the earthquake from the Xining office, the organization sent out an appeal to raise funds. You have replied to this appeal enthusiastically.

Thanks to your participation in our campaign we were immediately able to organize the distribution of basic necessities. Our staff in Xining (two Italians, Federica and Pierfrancesco,



and eight local people) made straight for Yushu where they distributed 800 kits with food (sugar, salt, tea, tsampa – flour made with toasted barley, butter, bread), products for personal hygiene (soap, toilet paper, steel washing bowls) and blankets.

The kits were distributed in the following way:

200 kits	to the government distribution centre which were later subdivided between the camp hospital and the nomads of the resettlement of Jiegu town.
100 kits	to the Yushu primary school
100 kits	to the families in the villages on the northern slope of the mountain
80 kits	were consigned in the villages around Jiegu that hadn't yet been reached by government assistance, thanks to the help of volunteers from a local NGO
320 kit	to the families of Jiegu who were in difficult

During and after the distribution of the kits, the ASIA staff carried out several assessments and surveys in order to understand the situation better and the damage caused by the earthquake, handed out questionnaires to identify the weakest points and met representatives from local institutions.

In this way they identified the target of the second distribution: **the third primary school in Yushu**. This is a large building seriously damaged by the earthquake which accommodated 3,100 students before the tremor. On request and under the coordination of the Department of Education, ASIA distributed help to the school staff (164 people) and supplied lunches to 1,500 students who had resumed lessons in the prefabricated buildings furnished by the Department of Education and other local organizations.

What was distributed?

We distributed the following to the school staff:

<i>Goods distributed to the teachers and the staff of the school</i>	
144 tents	with double waterproof layers, 12 sq.m. in size, padded with 5mm of felt, with rustproof metal frames
328 beds	2 beds per tent in stainless steel with sheets, pillows and blankets
164	cast-iron coal stoves
164	cooking pots
164	solar panels
5000 kg	of barley flour
486 kg	of yak butter

Besides the 164 teachers their families also benefitted indirectly from this distribution enabling us to give support to 700 people in all.

For the students' lunches we provided:

Foodstuffs distributed for the lunches of 1,500 students

22,500 kg of tsampa

2,250 kg of butter

The children's families also benefitted indirectly from this distribution.

With these initial distributions we have managed to support a total of about 9,000 people, distributing altogether 34,620 kg of tsampa, 4,742 kg of butter, blankets, tents, beds and essential goods.

Future Projects

Our next interventions will focus on the schools in order to support them in starting up school activities; on the clinics in order to supply basic health care to children and teachers; on water sanitization to avoid the spread of infection and illness and on the weakest elements: women, orphans and the elderly who we will help by distributing food, clothes, tents, mainly in anticipation of the next winter which, at 4000 metres a.s.l., will already be here in September. We need to act quickly, before the rigid winter temperatures (which go many degrees below zero) make life conditions impossible for the population of Yushu.

There is still a lot to do and it has to be done very soon!

We are not going to stop now

Help us to help.

With a bank draft in the name of ASIA Onlus

In the name of ASIA Onlus - IBAN: IT 27 M 01030 72160 000000389350;
BIC/SWIFT: PASC IT M1G99

With a credit card on our website www.asia-onlus.org



A Story

by Federica Grassi, ASIA project coordinator in Qinghai

In recent days a new phase has opened up in the town of Jiegu: **demolition has started**. The buildings that survived the violent earthquake of last April 14 and the numerous aftershocks that followed and were registered in the area in the last two months have been given numbers from 1 to 3 according to the damages caused by the earthquake. All the buildings that have been given the number 3 will be demolished, those with number 2 will be repaired and the few that have been given the number 1 will remain standing provided that the new Yushu urban planners do not consider them to be badly positioned. However, the succession of other tremors causing new collapses and damage, make assessment of the situation more complicated.

The situation of displaced people is practically unchanged: some of them have camped in the rubble of their homes while others camp in special tent camps. Living conditions are extremely difficult and **people are living in poverty and unhealthy circumstances**. In the town there are some areas with running water but there are no public toilets except for a few near the entrance to the town. Of the four electric generators that ran before the earthquake only one is still working and it does not manage to fulfill the needs of everyone. So people use candles, solar panels and generators. The telephone line has been restored.

ASIA has concluded its second distribution of help which benefitted the 164 teachers at the third primary school in Yushu and their families and 1,500 children.

The distribution of tents, blankets, beds, stoves, solar panels, pots and food took place in three stages. Once the school staff had received their kits, they set themselves up in different points around the town: some of them in the ruins of their homes, others in the camps for displaced people that have been created because of the risk of a dam collapsing (some areas of the town have been evacuated).

The tents will ensure temporary housing for the entire time required for reconstruction, which will be a period from 3 to 5 years. The placing of the camps and the tents is not final. The reconstruction plan for the town is still provisory and when reconstruction work begins people will be asked to leave the ruins of their homes and to move elsewhere.

In the violent earthquake these people have lost everything they had. Amongst the rubble in which they live lies their entire lives – buried there are all the things they bought with



sacrifice while accumulating debts, their life histories with their family ties and emotions that they will be forced to abandon in order to start everything over from scratch.

Besides their possessions many people lost family members and friends in the earthquake. Many children have become orphans who, if they are fortunate, will be handed over to relatives. Very often, however, this solution is not possible and the children are sent to orphanages in Xining, Peking or Shanghai that are far from their town and from their social-cultural surroundings and family.

Another emergency situation concerns the elderly and disable who have lost those who provided a means of support for them. Immediately after the earthquake, many of them received no benefits from the emergency distributions since they had nobody to go and get their rations.



During our distribution at the third primary school in the county we were able to experience first hand one of these tragedies in the earthquake tragedy. In the tremor, Nyinma Dempa, a teacher, and his wife lost their lives, leaving two children, a boy of 11 and a girl of 2 (found alive under the bodies of her parents) and Nyinma's two elderly parents of 79 and 67, his mother is infirm. This new family unit has no way to provide for themselves and until our arrival did not even have a tent in which to live. They received some help and support from friends and from the school. Their fear is that they will be separated and that the children will be handed over to other relatives or sent to an orphanage. At the moment, thanks to our intervention, they have at least a place where they can all live together.



**Meeting Venerable Tenzin Soepa
by Costantino Albini, long distance sponsor**

Before landing, the twin engines of the Kingfisher Airlines trace a wide circle in the sky, showing us the verdant beauty of the Dehra Dun valley, framed by the imposing snow tipped peaks of the Western Gahrwal. Once we have landed we travel by car through a thick forest where coming across a human being is very rare in comparison to the teeming crowds that one gets used to almost immediately in India. Here, our driver informs us, it is not unusual to see wild animals: not only the very common intrusive “red face” *rhesus* Macaque but also the shy very elegant “black face” *langur* known as the Hanuman monkey, and then deer, roe deer, wild boar, wild dogs, wolves, various felines (the famous Corbett Tiger Reserve is not far away) and even the wild elephant!

Anyway, even without seeing elephants or tigers the route is impressive and you can sense a rhythm of life that is much more relaxed than life in the big cities. Leaving behind the noisy little town of Dehra Dun, full of luxurious boarding schools and large military barracks, we climb up the winding road that leads to Mussoorie, going from 700 metres up to 2,000 in 34 kilometres.

Our point of arrival is a place called Happy Valley. There for the first time I am going to meet the elderly monk that my wife Patrizia, who has sadly passed away, and I have sponsored for seven years. We often

said that one day we would go to meet him. Marco and Elena who are also friends and supporters of ASIA are with me on this trip.



Venerable Tenzin Soepa belongs to the Gelugpa or “Virtuous” School which the Dalai Lama is part of. He arrived from Tibet without a family to support him and at his age could not afford to stay in a monastery. The Tibetan



monastic system does not have an ecclesiastical financial system with banks and is not able to provide centralized support for members of the clergy. Their families have to take responsibility for them, something that families are quite proud to do. However, for a monk without a family and without means of support, life is difficult. It is for these people that ASIA's Long Distance Sponsorship (SAD) program can make a difference.

We finally arrive at the Tibetan Homes Foundation in the middle of a pleasant valley that really is deserving of the name. Kalsang Namgyal, who is in charge of the SAD, does the honours and welcomes us very warmly. The building, which is next to an important community of Tibetan families, is a large complex and well cared for: there is a temple, a family house for the elderly and a co-educational boarding school for young students many of whom we see filing off to class. They smile at us in a happy sunny way with an easy-going air about them that forecasts the arrival of the school holidays.

Finally we are led to the little houses of the monks around a small temple which the whole local community has access to. They are small very simple one-floor constructions in a row.

Tenzin Soepa is a simple monk, without a title of rank or higher studies. He is 83 years old, has great faith in the Three Jewels and in the Dalai Lama, and, fortunately for him, has a robust constitution. He is a Spartan type; his eyes have a forthright and vigorous shine though they are lightly covered by a veil of age. His back is as straight as an arrow, his hands deformed by arthritis. He welcomes us with the traditional *kata*, the white scarf used for greetings, and invites us into his small cell.

A bed, a small altar, a chair and a small table, a little cupboard in a corner. On the altar, some statues of Buddha, Chenrezig, the Buddha of Universal Compassion, Tsongkapa, the great founding Master of the Gelug school and some photographs of the Dalai Lama. And then some candles, a biscuit as an offering, some prayer books. Nothing else.

His first words are of gratitude and thanks for our support and of comfort to me in my mourning.

"By the grace of Lord Buddha, I am in good health", he tells us, "although I feel the aches and pains of old age more in the cold season!". He laughs with that modesty that is typical of Asian people who want to minimize serious things.

We give him some wool socks, a very nice scarf and a warm hat. Then, with Kalsang translating, we ask him if there is anything more that we can do for him, if he has any particular wish.

His eyes become moist. "In all these years, since I came to India, I have never been able to participate in the great annual Monlam in Bodhgaya, with His Holiness the Dalai Lama."

Even if we didn't know how meaningful it is for every monk to be able to join the Dalai Lama in the prayers of the Monlam Chenmo at least once in his life, his ecstatic expression, almost childishly pure, reveals the dream of this simple spiritual man.

We exchange a few words with Kalsang and establish an amount that will reasonably let him make the journey and stay there for the necessary time. For our western wallets it is an almost ridiculous amount but as soon as our interpreter lets him know that his wish has been fulfilled his emotional response makes us understand that we have done the most important thing that we could for him.

At dusk, the cold Himalayan air reminds us that the moment to say goodbye has come. The warmth and sincerity with which the monk promises to pray for us "every day", his smile as he watches us leaving will remain in our memories for ever and gives this journey a rare and precious meaning – in our heart of hearts we know that in this far off country we have a friend.



NEWS FROM OUR PROJECTS



ASIA in Nepal

by Silvia Beccacece, Head of ASIA's project in Nepal

In December 2009 ASIA Onlus officially established its Nepalese Headquarters in Boudhanath, the lively Tibetan quarter of Kathmandu. In addition to following more closely the long distance support projects that started up years ago in Nepal (sponsorship of 173 children at the *Manasarovar Academy* elementary school in Boudhanath and support for 53 monks of *Triten Norbutse Bonpo Monastery* in Swayambhunath), the ASIA staff are starting up a water and sanitation project in the Kavrepalanchok District, in accordance with the Project Agreement signed with the Social Welfare Council, the local government body in charge of the institutional management of cooperation projects.



The project will last three years and be carried out thanks to the economic support of Intervita Onlus. Its general objective is the improvement of the health conditions of the target population (3500 people) and of the educational opportunities for about 1000 children who live in the selected communities.

The selection of the project area was made following the indications set down by the Nepalese government which strongly encourages the International NGOs to decentralize their interventions in rural areas, and on the basis of the infrastructural needs that the Village Development Committee expresses to the district offices. After an in-depth phase of assessment in the field which started in

August 2008, the VDC in Deubhumi Baluwa, situated about 50 km from Kathmandu, was singled out as the recipient of the interventions.

During the preparatory phase a number of meetings were organized with the population



benefitting from the project, most of whom belong to the Danuar ethnic group who are greatly discriminated against by Nepalese society, and the main stakeholders who had a fundamental role during the realization of the project. In particular, in the VDC there is an interesting Women's Group, led by a very active leader, which meets from time to time to consider important topics such as Saving Credit and Loans. In order to measure the level of poverty of the inhabitants of Baluwa just think that the monthly savings of a family belonging to the microcredit group is 25 Nepalese rupies, or about 25 euro cents.

The project that was undertaken by ASIA plans to develop two components: one strictly linked to the theme of water and sanitation and the other aimed at hygiene-health improvements and supporting the day schools of at least 15 elementary schools situated in Baluwa and in two bordering VDCs.

The first part of the project will provide Baluwa village (3500 inhabitants) with a gravitational water system which will supply about 75 public water fountains (on average eight families), guaranteeing the daily minimum standard of 25 litres of potable water per person. At the moment the fountains supplying the area are part of an old water system that has become completely inefficient, with little streams and wells that are not very deep, with the quality of the water being noticeably below the WHO (World Health Organization) standard and appearing to have negative effects on the health of the inhabitants. Family toilets with double septic tanks will also be built that will be able to generate compost that can be used as organic fertilizer in the vegetable gardens and in order to considerably reduce the widespread habit of open defecation.

In the construction phase the local population will be largely involved in order to develop a sense of community ownership that is fundamental for the long term duration of the infrastructures created. Consequently there will be training for the construction methods and the management and maintenance of the water systems and the toilets, as well as a serious campaign to make people aware of the importance of water and personal and environmental hygiene.

The education component of the project, on the other hand, plans to have interventions geared towards guaranteeing the regularity of lessons by distributing scholastic material such as notebooks, pencils, colours, and other equipment which is severely lacking at the state elementary schools in the villages. It also plans to set up structural interventions to supply potable water through the creation of a Rainwater Harvesting Unit, to improve or build new school toilets and in general activities aimed at raising the hygiene-health level at the schools (paving the school yards, work on the school buildings, maintenance of the existing water systems).

The project activities will be supported by means of a series of training sessions and workshops for the teachers in order to perfect educational methods, and for the parents of the students in order to raise the level of awareness of the importance of school attendance. The students will be involved in the campaign for Hygiene Promotion and given Hygiene kits.

At the moment the project is in the start-up phase: the first interventions in the area regarding topological surveys, drawing up a report on the local population by means of a baseline survey and forming work groups, as well as the distribution of school material will be put into effect in the next three months.



In order to follow the project in the field on a daily basis, ASIA has recently opened a Field Office at Dhulikhel, the capital town of Kavrepalanchok district and is working together with a local NGO, Enpho, which is expert in the management of environmental and water and sanitation projects.

There were many reasons that impelled us to go into Nepal. This country – just like India – borders on China and is home to an important part of the Tibetan diaspora which ASIA has been supporting for years thanks to long distance support for children and monks. In addition Nepal has been devastated by a civil war that has brought the population, today one of the poorest in the world, to its knees. For this reason we decided to get involved with medium and long term projects and also to extend our contribution to Bhutan and Outer Mongolia where, in 2010, we are planning to carry out feasibility missions, in view of their strong ethnic, cultural and spiritual affinity with Tibet.

