



# ASIANEWS N° 1/2009

The Newsletter for the Sustainers and Friends of Tibet

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**Help ASIA Get Close to Tibet!**

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**Dear friends,**

we send you this first issue of our newsletter 2009 in occasion of Losar, the Tibetan new year. Together with a lot of friends of the Tibetan people we from ASIA decided not to celebrate it this year.

Trough the witnesses and updates from our projects, we wish that our online newsletter may help also during this “earth-ox-year” to get you close to Tibet and the Asian continent. **Enjoy reading!**

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**ASIA's projects in Tibet: Perspectives for 2009**  
by Andrea Dell'Angelo, the Director of ASIA Onlus

December 2008: almost 10 months after the tragic events in Lhasa, we returned to the Tibetan Autonomous Region and Amdo. The main aims of the mission were to meet ASIA staff – Tibetan and expatriate – who had remained there during this extremely difficult period, monitor the projects that were underway, verify new projects to present to donors for 2009 and verify the future of ASIA's projects in China with the authorities.

**The impact on Lhasa is very sad to see.**

In recent years the city has suffered more drastic modernisation and destruction. Old Tibetan houses have been destroyed and their place taken by buildings in modern Chinese style. The strongest impression was to see Lhasa completely under military control. Soldiers, roadblocks, soldiers posted on the roofs, armoured cars in the heart of the sacred city are something difficult to get used to.

The hotels and restaurants are empty and there are very few Chinese and Western tourists. Discontent, fear and frustration were the feelings that we met every day when meeting old friends or walking in the streets.

**In Lhasa we started up a three-year health project jointly financed by the European Union. The project will provide three year training for medical staff from Panam county in Shigatse prefecture.**

The fact that we obtained authorization for our expatriate staff and for starting up activities for this important project meant a great success at this particular time in which most international organisations have been forced to leave the country.

**In Chamdo prefecture in the Tibetan Autonomous Region we also restarted the activities of the health project financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs** which had been suspended since May because of the disorders that took place in Lhasa and in all the areas inhabited by the Tibetan minority. The local authorities had refused to renew the permits for our staff who had had to return to Italy. Once we were in Lhasa we managed to obtain authorization for them and the medical coordinator arrived in Chamdo on December 1<sup>st</sup> to start up activities again involving training and furnishing equipment to the clinics of the district and the villages in the county.

Unfortunately due to the great tensions that continue to exist in all regions and to the new repressive measures of the Chinese government, we were not able to monitor some of the ongoing projects in the eastern areas of the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

Leaving Lhasa we went to Xining where one of the most important seats of ASIA is located and started our mission to Amdo.

We left for **Dongche** where ASIA has built a primary and middle school, a Tibetan medicine clinic and, in 2008, the first **Bonpo study and practice college** in Hainan prefecture. The college was completed in September and, thanks to the contribution of the Dutch Embassy, ASIA has constructed a building with 14 rooms for 72 students, one with 12 rooms for the teachers and older students and another with 6 classrooms for courses which will last nine years and will cover subjects ranging from grammar to astrology and medicine, study of the Sutras, Tantras and Dzogchen.





All the buildings have been constructed using techniques that are energy saving and that make use of bio-architecture, with solar walls which accumulate heat in order to heat the rooms and the classrooms. At the moment there are 70 students and several teachers, two of whom come from Lopon Tenzin Namdak's college in Nepal.

After checking all the work we prepared the second phase of the project – which we hope to be able to complete during 2009 – to build the kitchen, refectory, offices and a separate building with 9 rooms to be used for practising the most esoteric teachings linked to Dzogchen.

We collected all the documentation in order to start up a **distance support project for all the students at the college** who will attend the study and practice courses for nine years. The scholastic perspectives of the village, however, are very difficult. As soon as we got to the school we discovered that the government authorities intended to close the Dongche school – the first school built by ASIA and inaugurated by Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche in 1997.

In recent months, in Hainan prefecture the government has drawn up and is putting into operation a new policy for educating the Tibetan minority called the “**Combining Education Policy**”. This reform plans to eliminate all the Tibetan village schools and to group all the students from the primary, middle and secondary schools in a small number of schools. The primary schools will be concentrated at the district level, the middle schools at the county level and the secondary schools in the prefecture capitals. The schools will be large barracks with 2000/3000 students, housed in enormous modern buildings devoid of any type of historical, cultural or environmental context.

The aim, so they say, is to give equal opportunities to all students and to improve the quality of education. But actually, the results will be to bring up the new generations far from their cultural and family surroundings. It is unthinkable that the culture and traditions of a people such as the Tibetan people can be transmitted and preserved only through scholastic teaching. The culture of a people is transmitted from the first days of life by living in one's own cultural ambient, observing, learning and experiencing one's own customs and traditions handed down in the course of centuries, from generation to generation.

Of course we tried to get them to change the decisions made about Dongche. After numerous meetings with the authorities of the county they decided that the Dongche school would not be closed and would remain a primary school. The middle school students will be transferred to the county school. We tried to convince them to leave the Dongche middle school, too, but up to now we haven't succeeded and meetings and negotiations are still under way.

It is important to remember, for example, that this year one of the Tibetan students from Dongche who has followed all the courses from the nursery up to the middle school at this school and then attended secondary school at Gonghe, with distance support through ASIA, won **first prize as the best student in the whole of Qinghai province** and has been admitted to the university of Peking. This student is not the only one to have obtained excellent results and many students from Dongche have obtained brilliant results thanks to the training courses organised by ASIA. This is proof that these types of schools work and guarantee a modern education in a rural environment and are accessible to all students whether from farming families or nomadic ones.

Then we went on to Tongde where ASIA has been working for several years with the **Nyingmapa monastery of Sangkhri** to publish all the texts used at the study colleges of this school. The first phase of this project was concluded at the end of 2007 with the publication of 3000 sets of twenty volumes each, for a total of 60,000 volumes which were distributed to students from the Nyingmapa colleges in Qinghai and Sichuan.

Seeing the success of this initiative and the requests coming from all the regions in China inhabited by Tibetans, a second phase of the project for the publication of 12,000 sets for a total of 240,000 volumes was presented to the Dutch embassy and financed in May 2008.



Unfortunately, up to now we had not managed to start up the project again and finally in December after having gathered together offers and estimates, we finalised the contract with a printing press in Tianjin for the publication of the entire 240,000 volumes. The printing work should be finished by June 2009 and then **the texts will be distributed to 160 Nyingmapa colleges in Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Tar.**

At the same time, we verified the start of a second project with Sangkhri monastery, again financed by the Dutch Embassy, which plans to construct a building with 10 classrooms for courses and 12 rooms to accommodate the 300 students who are registered at Sangkhri college. Even this project that should have started in May 2008 had been blocked up to December and finally now after various meetings and after having prepared the new architectural designs is in the phase of starting and should be completed by December 2009.

Another very important project is the **clinic of Ane Kandroma**, a famous lady doctor and Master who lives near Lake Kokonor. Here, several years ago, ASIA built a traditional clinic specialising in medicinal baths. Since Ane Kandroma was very well-known in this area, the number of patients immediately began to grow and required enlarging the clinic and accommodation for the health staff.

The second phase of the project was presented to donors and financed in May 2008. Unfortunately the local government decided that all the buildings near the lake had to be destroyed. We do not know when and if owners who will be expropriated will receive indemnity.

Due to this uncertain situation, the second phase of the project was not started and through meetings and discussions ASIA has been trying to obtain permission from the government to rebuild the clinic in another area and to make them pay indemnity. Up to today, we have not been able to find a solution, but we hope that in March the project will finally be able to start.

ASIA is still managing a lot of ongoing projects in Qinghai and other projects should start up in the course of 2009. To that end we have met with all the authorities in Qinghai who have assured us that ASIA is very respected at the local level and that the projects are welcomed and will be able to continue without problems.

During this mission it was not possible to get to Derge because the entire prefecture of Ganze was closed to foreigners. For this reason ASIA had to close two important projects – the sanitary project financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a project for creating 10 water systems in 10 villages in Derge county and for the improvement of sanitary conditions for the local population.

In spite of the difficult situation, we managed to complete the first two buildings of the **Derge school** and during this period we bought all the equipment for the classrooms and the dormitories. Then the equipment was transported from Chengdu to Derge and delivered to Khenpo Sonam who is in charge of the school.

2009 will be a very complicated year for Tibet, for the Tibetan people and for the non-governmental organisations that work in these areas. This year there are three anniversaries: the celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> year after the long march of 1949, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the insurrection in Lhasa and the flight of the Dalai Lama from Tibet, and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the massacre of Tienanmen Square. As the month of March slowly draws nearer the tensions are growing and with the aim of preventing uprisings or disorders, the Chinese government has deployed a huge military machine.

**In spite of this, ASIA will continue its humanitarian, peaceful and non-political commitment in favour of the Tibetan people who today more than ever need your support.**

Rome, January 2009



## OUR PROJECTS



### Sri Lanka

by Federica Voltolini, Project Manager of ASIA in Sri Lanka

*Urawatta and Galagoda Handicraft Skill Deelopment Society* is the name of the women's cooperative that Asia helped create in the svouth-west of Sri Lanka, thanks to the support of the Tuscany an Lazio regions and in collaboration with the Interregional Observatory on Cooperation for Development (OICS)

This project was born from the collaboration between Asia and the community of Urawatta, a fisher's village that was heavily damaged by the tsunami. Here Asia has built a community center to host the local fisher's association, a microcredit bank and a kindergarten, fundamental spaces for the village life.

The idea of this new cooperation came about to encourage a socio economical development that would promote the role of women and support income producing activities. The goal of the project that Asia is promoting is indeed to allow women in the community to put together and manage traditional productive activities and, at the same time, take advantage of new work opportunities allowing them better economic and life conditions.

The activities began with a research to understand the context and its needs from the point of view of the position of women in the community of Urawatta and the neighbour village of Galagoda, an area in which have settled other communities forced by the seaquake to abandon their coastal village.

In detail, in collaboration with the National Craft Council, government institute committed to the promotion of handicraft activities based in the territory, and with the goal to diversify the local production, courses were held for dressmaking, working fibers and coconut, batik and incense making. In addition, a course was set up in collaboration with the College of Fishery and Nautical Engineering of Galle to enable women to sell fresh fish exceeding market needs as dried fish.

Asia supplied the participants with the material and equipment both to train and continue work activities, for example the machine to dry fish, equipment to spin coconut fiber, equipment to cut, finish and polish coconut. A few months past the training phase, we are happy that a number of women that took these courses has been able to start producing and selling locally their handicrafts.

At the present time Asia continues to follow and sustain the development of the cooperative by meeting weekly with the different working groups, and by activities varying from the collaboration in creating catalogues for the products so as to reach a larger local market and



possibly the international one of fair trade, to the organization of training to strengthen the structure of the cooperative and the management of manufacturing and sale of handicrafts.

The enthusiasm and courage shown by the women in undertaking courses and new activities are strong and catching. At this time, new formative courses are being prepared for additional 50 women in the village of Galagoda.

With the goal of giving concrete support to the start of production of the new cooperative, this year Asia decided to ask the women of Urawatta and Galagoda to make a number of products to be sold during the banquets and other Christmas events that Asia promotes in Italy to collect funds. To this first order, the women have answered with much happiness and commitment.

Thus were produced bags, place mats, cases, oven mitts and kitchen aprons, made with handwoven fabrics in bright colors that keep the flavor of the country. Is important to underscore that the fabrics were bought at government trade centers that guarantee to the workers a deserving wage specified by the law.

The women also produced pot mats in coconut fiber, natural and colored, earrings bracelets and pendants in coconut, incenses. These are handicrafts produced with care and commitment, the result of a road the women of Urawatta and Galagoda have taken toward an improvement of both their lives and the community to which they belong. Buying this products you can help them on their path.

## WITNESSES FROM LONG DISTANCE SPONSORSHIP



### **A meeting with my sponsor child in Dharamsala.**

by Heidi Trondsen, long distance sponsor, Oslo, Norway

During my travels in India last summer, I spent some time in Dharamsala. There I got the chance to go and see “my” little girl of 10 years old, Migmar, who lives in the Tibetan Childrens Village there. I have been sponsoring her for a while through Asia Onlus. Migmar is one of the many children who escaped from Tibet by walking for days on end to cross the boarder and reach Nepal, sent by their parents for safety and possibility for a future. She was then sent to TCV in Dharamsala.

Since I had left the sponsor details back in Norway (mistake!), I wasn't really sure whether I was going to the right place... It turned out that there were many TCV's in the Dharamsala area, and in the one where Migmar lives, there is 2500 children! I made some phone calls, and managed to find the right village. The secretary sent a message to Migmar, who only got one hour notice that her sponsor was coming! Poor Migmar looked a bit scared when we met, but she was holding the hand of her best friend, so it wasn't too bad. Mrs. Tsenkyi, who had lived since childhood in the TCV, and now works in the sponsorship department, was ever so



kind and understanding. She said that it is very special for the children when they meet their sponsor. We had tea, and talked. Mrs. Tsenkyi was translating. I asked Migmar if there was anything she would like to have, since I would come back the next day with some presents for her. "One schoolpen", she answered, ever so modest, in English. But she needed everything, and the next day she got a new school bag, shoes, winter jacket etc. It was like Christmas eve for her. I was invited to see the room where she stayed with a "mother" and 35 other children. It was packed. They were studying for an exam. Everybody was sitting still, concentrating. No noise. It was amazing. They all got to have a break to see Migmar's sponsor, and show me around. One big bedroom with 35 children, living so peacefully. But since they were studying, I could not stay long, and had to say good bye without being able to take Migmar and her best friend for a little trip, as I had hoped. Next time I go to see her, I will definitely plan it better. When I later returned to Norway, I found a very happy letter from Migmar in the mailbox. "You came to see me!" she wrote. It ended with LOVE YOU, MISS YOU! I was moved to tears. Now we are really connected. I am preparing to send her a Christmas greeting, and found the most beautiful card in the bookstore. It says: *"Parents hold their children's hands for a while, but their hearts forever!"*. I think that is a very good message to all children who are separated from their parents by necessity.

## WITNESSES FROM LONG DISTANCE SPONSORSHIP



### **A never ended adventure**

by [Roberte Pelonero](#) and [Gino Corinaldesi](#), long distance sponsors, Rome

In 1997, myself and my partner Gino adopted long distance a boy, son of Tibetan refugees in Katmandu after the Chinese invasion of Tibet. His name is Ngodup Chonden.

We were informed of the possibility of long distance adoptions by a couple we had met sometime before, and who had in their turn adopted a girl child thru the association Asia and we then decided to gather additional information. It did not take us long to think about it, but we joined the initiative almost immediately. Actually, our dream has always been to make our first important trip to Nepal. I do not know why, but we have always been attracted by these places, and I believe that this too contributed to us accepting the adoption with so much enthusiasm.

The following year we managed to turn this dream into reality and finally leave for Nepal, where we met for the first time the boy and his family. We went to their house to meet them, and, for us, it was a profound feeling to know these simple people who in very few hours offered us all they could and tried in all ways to make us feel comfortable. Dinner was excellent, and at the end we were offered biscuits and yak dried cheese to take with us for the trekking we intended to start in a couple of days.



Our adventure has not stopped since then. We were back to visit them in 2005, and I still have clear in my mind the memory of the mother so sweetly crying happily, her front against mine.

Ngodup has always been a model student and he has obtained his diploma in 2004 with excellent grades. In theory, at this point, our support could have ended, as the Association is committed to take care of the boys' instruction up to the diploma. We however saw that Ngodup had a great desire to continue his studies and we realized that, with just his diploma and his status as a refugee, he could only achieve jobs low-level and not well paid. Accordingly, we decided to keep financing him, so he could enrol in a college and continue his studies, well knowing that our economic commitment would be that much higher.

Today, in 2008, we are still in touch with the boy, who now lives and works in India, after achieving a degree in pharmacy. We are obviously happy and proud of this result, but there is still the lingering regret we could not push our commitment after the second year, due to intervening economic difficulties. As a matter of fact, his dream would have been to become a doctor, and we would have been overjoyed if we could have helped him make a reality of it. Therefore we consider this only a partial success and keep hoping, in a near future, of being able to help him complete his studies. We hope it fervently as well because we are convinced that access to higher education is a fundamental premise for the emancipation and cultural survival of the tibetan people.

*Since 2004 ASIA has started a scholarship program to support the most skilled high school and university students willing to carry their training process on.*

*41 Euros per month are enough to give a student in India and Tibet a qualified education and further opportunities of integration in the modern society,*

Info at: [www.asia-ngo.org](http://www.asia-ngo.org) or mail to [adozioni@asia-ngo.org](mailto:adozioni@asia-ngo.org)

## WITNESSES FROM LONG DISTANCE SPONSORSHIP



### **Down to my memorylane**

by Tendar Tsering, tibetan student in exile (Dharamsala) and beneficiary of ASIAs long distance sponsorship program

I was born in Tibet in a farmer family, in a village where there was no school for children, no hospitals for patients, no electricity and no vehicles for travelling.

Hence, every villager wanted to send their children to India because they knew that in India there are schools providing free Tibetan education. But none of my villagers could send their children to India and I was the only privileged child from our village who could successfully escape from Tibet and study in India.



It was my father who begged money from our relatives and family friends for my journey to India. And 1997 was the black year which forced my family to hold a farewell party for my departure to India. Though illiterate, my parents were very broad minded, and very brave who could bear the risk to send me to India, but my departure from them proved their real personality. The image of my parents crying like a child and hanging their hands in the air to see off me is still hovering around my eyes and that is the only thing that I remember crystal-clear about my child hood life in Tibet. When I think about my journey from Tibet, I feel very proud of myself as I have bravely and successfully crossed the gigantic snow mountain Himalaya though I was only 12 years old.

### **My home away from home; 'TCV'**

As soon as my journey mates and I arrived in India, we were well received by the Tibetan reception centre in India and later on, I was admitted into T.C.V.(Tibetan Children Village) school Gopalpur. Being as a new arrival, every thing seemed stranger to me; except the soil and sky.

With the rolling of time, I could realize how I was lucky to get such golden opportunity to study our own language, culture and history along with the modern education.

Indeed, I have suffered a lot, but the problems that I faced turned me into a very strong, broad minded and industrious. Besides being topper in my class, I am also a good player though not a great sports star. I was in the school basket ball team and once won an award inter boys' best boy for year 1999.

As a young student, respecting my teachers and valuing my studies is a part and parcel of my good character and I used to have good contact with my subject teachers. Even from my lower classes, I am a great book worm and I used to read a lot. After class eight, I left sports aside and emphasized more on my studies. I penned a lot of poems and articles for my school magazine. I participated in inter school essay competition and won prizes too.

From class nine till at the end of my school life, I was in the school magazine editorial board. During class eleven, I wrote a novel entitled "A Promised Tibetan" and published it. I won the hearts of my readers and it inspired me to write more. Few of my highly valued articles and poems have been published in Tibetan Review.

After completing my tenth standard, I was asked to choose my stream and I selected Arts stream as I realized my interest and talent lies in the field of Arts. Of course, in the Arts stream, I was always reserved to get the first position in English. Writing, reading and sharing my write-ups had become a habit of mine and my school mates used to enjoy it a lot.

After finishing my plus two exams, I searched for a college where I could study "creative writing" but later on, I came to know that in India, no colleges are providing that course! Hence, I joined Loyola college for English literature (Loyola college ranks in the best top ten college list in India) and I love my present college.

### **My career plan**

I feel there is a strong drive inside myself which makes me mad in writing and dream to become a writer. Though my parents have given me the life but if I think deeply, what I am now is just because of my school TCV. I have got such golden opportunity to study in India in the name of Tibetan, and I feel I am a complete Tibetan for Tibet, not for my family or for myself.



### Sponsor a tibetan child!

Dear friends,

In 2008 ASIA would have liked to celebrate with you 20 years of work and wholehearted commitments in favour of the Tibetan people and their ancient culture. Instead, we have found ourselves facing one of the most difficult and dramatic moments in history for Tibet.

So there will be no festivities, but just enormous attempts to continue to guarantee support and solidarity for the Tibetan people. **ASIA is one of the few international NGOs - and the only Italian one - that is still present in the Tibetan territory. We believe that in this tragic moment the only instrument that ensures us a functional presence and assured results is distance adoption.**

Through distance adoption you can give a Tibetan child the possibility to study his or her own culture, to continue to know how to read and write his own language, to know about the traditions and the wisdom of his thousand year old culture. And, at the same time, how to compete in modern society.

Since 1994 we have managed to give more than 1500 children the possibility to study, with an increase in the rate of education and a significant impact for local communities.

As well as this, since 2005, thanks to distance adoption, more than 200 monks have been able to stay at the Colleges of Buddhist studies and practice and devote themselves to deepening their knowledge and to the transmission of the precious spiritual and cultural patrimony of Tibet.

Many of you already participate in the life of a child or a monk and have the experience of meeting such a rich and diverse culture through correspondence and information received from the school and our local representatives.

I put my trust in the friendship of you all for Tibet and for ASIA. I ask you to renew your support, once again, this year, and to help us promote distance adoption for a child or a monk as much as possible. Speak to your friends, relatives and colleagues about it. Give a friend a distance adoption for Losar. In a moment of economic recession like the present one in which people are renouncing every form of wastefulness, giving a child hope for a better future is a valuable and responsible gesture.

25 euro a month is sufficient to distance support a child, 16 euro a month for a monk.

For any information please contact Roberta Caminiti:

[adozioni@asia-ngo.org](mailto:adozioni@asia-ngo.org)

Sincere thanks to you from all the staff of ASIA!



## CALLS AND CAMPAIGNS



### **Derge School Update on building**

Dear Friends,

Thanks to all your generous contributions, this year we have completed building the dormitories for the School of Derge!

We have all the needed fittings for classrooms and dormitories, so the children of Derge will be able to finally utilize the new buildings in the school.

Pictures of the buildings are available at

[www.asia-ngo.org/dergeschool](http://www.asia-ngo.org/dergeschool)

In March, hoping that circumstances will finally be back to normal, after the winter break, we will resume working on the kitchen, the dining hall, the sanitary services, enclosing walls and gate. Our goal is to conclude the project by fall 2009.