



Tibetans

Nepal

Zimbabwe

UK

Tibetan Culture - now and for the future

All over the world, indigenous cultures are under threat - whether from globalisation, increasing materialism or conflict and wars. We all adapt to our immediate culture and environment, but in an increasingly materialistic world that often results in cultural and spiritual poverty.

The Tibetan culture is still very much alive, but increasingly endangered by other cultures and languages replacing their own. For example, many schools now teach in Chinese and the pressure to conform to modern work practices means the loss of traditional ceremonies; values are changing.



A lesson on Culture, to a class at Jantsa School, by English Teacher Anna Symington.

The heart of Tibetan life was once the monastery which was central to cultural and social life, providing spiritual guidance, education and health for the whole population. Most monasteries were destroyed in the Cultural Revolution, but subsequently re-built and it is these that are now the guardians of the culture and language of the Tibetan



A dancer at Cham Festival at Namdzong Gompa.

people.

ROKPA is doing what it can to help: encouraging the Tibetan people to maintain their culture and have confidence in establishing their right in law to practice it. It is also supporting education in monasteries, nunneries and schools where the children are taught in Tibetan, sponsoring college students to study Tibetan language, Tibetan Medicine, art and carving, sponsoring the building of cultural monuments at historically significant sites and supporting the preservation of important Tibetan scripts. Much has already been done, but time is running out and we need your help as never before.

She never went to school...

It is the end of October. ROKPA fieldworkers sit in the middle school in Dzamthang, Aba, where we have been supporting young people for many years. A little more than half of the 500 pupils are girls. ROKPA supports 100 young people in different grades.

The iron stoves in each classroom have not yet been lit, but stacks of wood are there, ready for the winter. Wrapped in warm jackets the pupils sit in class, listening attentively and taking notes.

Damchog is 18 years old and in the first year of her higher secondary education. She dreams of becoming a translator for English and Tibetan to support her family. They live in a small village two miles away. Her mother died three years ago and her father is already 68 years old.

"My mother had been ill for a long time", says Damchog.

Because her father is too old to work and her two brothers are still in school, the livelihood of the entire



Damchog

family depends on the income of her older sister who works on a construction site. She has never been to school. Though working physically hard she barely earns enough to support them all to live, and certainly not to pay for Damchog's education.

"Yes, it IS worth it."

By Anna Symington

"It's easy to think that when we give money to charity, it disappears into a black hole, helping people we'll never meet in a place that seems so far away.

I've just returned from spending 1 1/2 yrs working as a volunteer English teacher at a Tibetan high school. I can tell you that for me, your donations were not abstract but meant that 250 of the students I saw every day could be there at school getting an education that could find them a job. They had the precious opportunity to carry on learning past the age of 16 and many had the chance to sit the college entrance exam.

The vast majority of the students at our school were the children of farmers, many of whom were illiterate in either Tibetan or Chinese and who were struggling to make ends meet. Any parent's dearest wish is for their children to be able to get the best possible education so that they can (continued overleaf)

Celebrating over 30 years of helping those in need



Photo: Anna Symington

better meet the tremendous challenges of life in the modern world. Sadly many Tibetan parents were simply not in a position to do this. This could be because of family break-ups, the death of one parent, low incomes,

illness or any number of other problems, and it is often the girls whose education is the first to be cut short. It is thanks to the kindness of ROKPA donors that these children have real chances, real options, real futures.

So I would like to extend a personal thank you and to ask if you can possibly continue to support ROKPA's work in the Tibetan areas of China. Your money is making a real difference."

Anna Symington

News from the Children's Home in Nepal.

There are many new faces at the Children's Home. In May, nine new children were brought into the Home.



The 9 new children outside the ROKPA Children's Home with Lea Wyler, project manager: from left to right: Shanti, Kunzang, Buddha, Lea Wyler, Badal, Pradik, Pemba and below from right to left: Jyoti, Bikal and Kalpana.

Each child taken into the Home comes from a background of suffering. Shanti and her brother Kunzang (below) came with their aunt. Apart from her they have no one left - both parents having died many years ago.



When they come they are incredibly sad and clearly understand that they are unwanted. Their aunt has nothing and can hardly fend for herself let alone give them a nurturing home. Two weeks later they have settled in and are really happy. They have been found to



Shanti and Kunzang two weeks later.

be great dancers and now smile nearly all the time.

All the bigger children at the Home look after up to three smaller ones who can come to them with all their problems and so no one is neglected.

Sabita, (below) was one of the 'little ones' until last year (when she went on



tour with the Dance Group to Switzerland and Poland), but is now the 'elder sister'.

Here she does the hair of Kalpana, the newcomer. Look how she stands there and how sure she now is of herself. Welcome to ROKPA!

There are many more like them out there, so if you can, please make a donation.

A new home for the Soup Kitchen.

The land on which the tents were annually erected for the winter Soup Kitchen, now belongs to ROKPA. At last, the uncertainty of being able to rent the land near the great Stupa in Boudhanath is over.

Margrit Sahel, who now manages the Kitchen, arranged for the erection of a building on the plot for its use during



the winter months. For the rest of the year it is a home for budding ROKPA entrepreneurs. Former ROKPA children Changba and Raja have both started small businesses nearby, and Changba now lives in the Soup Kitchen house.



Changba at his shop.

He sells books and stationery next to Raja who sells vegetables. Both are doing well and are now independent!

What Your Money Can Buy

£54 provides a **Tibetan** child with school materials for an entire year.

£45 / month can sponsor a young **Tibetan** through university / college education.

£50 offers a warming breakfast to 400 homeless people in **Nepal**.

£10 pays school costs for an AIDS orphan in **Zimbabwe** for 1 month.

£200 sponsors a disadvantaged youth for an 8 week course of education and training in **South Africa**.

Reporting from Zimbabwe

Surviving

1.6 million children have been made vulnerable as a result of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe, many being cared for by grandparents who themselves need support, or are in children's homes or on the streets.

Although the last 12 months have been relatively stable the vast majority of the population continues to suffer and struggle. Hyper-inflation has ended, but the country still faces the devastating effects of 11 years of economic and political collapse, recurrent droughts and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

About 90% of the population still lives below the poverty line, and increasing numbers of people are suffering from psychological illness, including depression. Many non-governmental organisations have now either pulled out or are reluctant to get involved.

There are government schools, hospitals and clinics, but the high cost makes them unaffordable. Electricity and water supplies are intermittent, as is phone and email communication. Many areas are still experiencing drought and the lack of maize means that there is not a secure supply of staple food.

One area of positive change is in the declining rate of spread of HIV/AIDS, which has fallen from over 25% a decade ago to 14.3%.

Children with disabilities suffer even



more – if their parents die, they do not usually survive for very long.

What is urgently needed is to rebuild families and communities economically, psychologically and socially, so that they can again provide comprehensive care and support for orphans and vulnerable children.

Sekesayi's story



Sekesayi Thikathali with friend Beata Mwenje

Sekesayi, mother of three boys, had become pregnant again. When her baby boy was born her husband rejected them both. It was only 9 months later, after the child became really ill that she had him and herself tested for HIV and found that they were both positive. Since she had never been promiscuous, Sekesayi's husband must have been the source of their infection.

By this time her son had contracted TB and meningitis and was almost completely paralyzed. Sekesayi enrolled them both in the government anti-retroviral program but both mother and son reacted to the treatment and developed severe rashes, loss of hair and appetite.

Sekesayi said: "When he was three years old my son died peacefully in my arms. At one time I tried committing suicide by standing on the railway tracks but the train never came, or it was mere luck because someone came and prayed for me."

It took months and much determination on Sekesayi's part to find the help she needed to improve her health so she could continue to look after her three remaining boys. "I was referred to ROKPA and went there that very day." They provided food so she could eat regularly, an essential when taking ARVs, gave prescriptions for medicines against the opportunistic infections that she and others with HIV frequently suffer from, and supportive group training in understanding her illness. In all, they provided her with the tools both physically and mentally to improve her life and become more self-supporting through growing her own vegetables and learning to eat healthily.

Sekesayi was lucky to survive.

£82 pays for a 3 day training course in organic, herbal and nutritional gardening. This includes individual activity plans and starter packs.

What does Rokpa do to help?

Our main priority is child protection. Support for hundreds of children, both able bodied and disabled, still in need of basic care and education. Most funds will be needed for this.

HIV/AIDS programmes – especially Tara ROKPA Therapy. We have seen that TRT is very effective in improving people's psychological and physical health. It builds their motivation and gives them a calmer, more grounded and positive attitude to life, making them able to benefit more from other programmes like



Photo: Annie Dibb

Mask making: part of the TRT program.

HIV, food growing and project management training. They also often take key positions in their communities, and spread their knowledge to those around them.

Food Security – training and supporting people to grow enough nutritious food for their families, to maintain their health and fight diseases. Groups often need regular support and advice.



Medicine and medical treatment

Most people cannot afford medical care, A prompt one-off treatment can often save a whole family from falling into destitution.

Drop-In Centre - Medical funding is the main request we meet. We will also offer a listening ear and refer people seeking help, when possible.

Finally, Rokpa Support Network Zimbabwe would like to thank all those who have helped us to help so many: children, the sick and the suffering, the homeless, the despised and those who were in despair. Your compassion has given strength, peace and dignity to those who had no-one else to turn to. We wish you could see how much it means to so many. This year we are relying on you more than ever before.



ROKPA News Autumn 2011

What is Rokpa?

In Tibetan, ROKPA means to help or serve. Founded in 1980 by Tibetan Doctor Akong Rinpoché, it is a non-political humanitarian aid organisation, helping people in need irrespective of their nationality, religion or cultural background.

ROKPA UK is part of Rokpa Trust, registered charity: 1059293 & SCO38628.

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Fundraising Activities

Thank you to all of you who have in so many ways been active in raising funds and awareness of ROKPA in the last 6 months. Here are a few examples:



Dr Maureen Scott and friends raised £1,539.09 at an April Dance event. A kind donor provided the venue and the bar staff gave their help for free.

A beautiful handmade quilt made by Ingrid Mair was raffled and raised a whopping £1,343 for our fund for Distressed Single Mothers. The quilt was won by Jean Stringman in Preston.

A Fundraising evening was held in Newcastle by Anne Marron & Ivo Luyck with an auction of promises and other activities. £1,166 was raised.

Judith Orrell and members of her parish church at Tring raised £1,250 this summer at various events.

Laura Dorantt held a Wellbeing evening near Aberdeen in September involving taster therapy sessions and raised over £500.

ROKPA in London

A special edition events and activities newsletter will be reaching all of you in the London area soon.

Join the ROKPA family and help raise funds

Contact us at ROKPA UK for help and support:

Ideas for fundraising.

Publicity materials.

ROKPA T shirts with our logo.

Collection Boxes and Buckets.

Publicity on our website AND

You can create your own webpage on www.justgiving.com/rokpauk

News from ROKPA in Edinburgh

The Big News is that we plan to expand the organisation and invite anyone with any talent or energy to join us.

Contact edinburgh@rokpa.org for further information on how you can be involved.

Expanding will allow us to help more exceptional young Tibetans to come to study in Edinburgh, like Nima, our latest arrival.



Nima is studying English at Jewel and Esk College. Edinburgh colleges have been wonderful supporters of ROKPA for many years.

News from

other recent students ...

Chunga Lhamo returned to Qinghai Province in 2009 to her job as a doctor of Traditional Tibetan Medicine. She reached an advanced level of English in Edinburgh which helps her communicate with ROKPA supporters all over Europe. She and her partner are also proud parents of two small children!

Palden Tsejal returned to develop a plant nursery in 2010 and cultivated the first medicinal plants this year. Despite a terribly hot summer, 40% of the crop survived and he is anxiously hoping that ROKPA supporters will continue to raise money for this important work.

Wenchangji (Woboo) returned in July to her job in international relations in the Tibetan Amdo area where her improved English is being a great help.

Tenpa returned in August to his wife and son in Yushu Prefecture. He is currently working as interpreter for ROKPA fieldworkers before finalising his proposal for a plant nursery near his home.

Droni returned to the UK from a visit to her Tibetan homeland in September and has begun the 4th year of her B.Sc course in horticulture/plant conservation at the Scottish Agriculture College.

A Tibetan journey

In August this year a group led by Catherine Brown took part in a sponsored trip to eastern Tibetan areas of China, around Derge, Litang and Kanze visiting ROKPA projects and spiritual sites.



One of the travellers, Gillian Pearlman told us: "My dream to travel to Tibet came

true with this incredible adventure. We saw first hand how Rokpa projects are preserving Tibetan culture and community, helping the education and welfare of children. We visited sacred pilgrimage sites of great beauty and significance, exploring, trekking and meeting Tibetan people in their own land."

Catherine hopes to take another group in 2012, this time visiting areas further west, including Dolma Lhakang, the monastic home of ROKPA's President, Dr Akong Tulku Rinpoche.

Get in touch if you are interested to know more.

An Appeal from South Africa

In the rural area of Groot Marico, there are 200 families who live near the Tara Rokpa Centre. Most of them are HIV positive. Their homes, which they do not own, are tin shacks with no facilities. There is no work, healthcare, transport or education and no government training or funds.

However, there is a government scheme to fund land buying to help people like these move to the towns.

ROKPA is trying its best to help families who wish to move. Those who have moved are proud of their new homes. Four have got married. There are now 25 families who want to follow.

Each adult first has to be helped to apply for identity papers. Then the whole process to find the plot, build the house and move, costs £390 (5,000 Rand) for each family.

Please can you help?