

Reforestation for Medicine

The need for reforestation in the lower Himalayas using medicinal plants

Tashi Jong*, an Indo-Tibetan community of some 800 people, including 150 Buddhist monks situated in the lower Himalayas south of Dharamsala, exhibits numerous problems which are typical for rural areas in India, especially in the mountainous regions of the state of Himachal Pradesh.

Besides a few shopkeepers and builders, most Indian inhabitants make a living as subsistence farmers, growing wheat and rice or rearing goats, sheep, buffalo or cattle. So as to obtain more grazing land, the local population annually burns government-planted pine trees, leaving ever more barren mountain ridges. Due to small plots of land distributed on terraced hills, poor soil quality and antiquated farming methods, the farmers are unable to compete with the larger farms in the plains to the south of Himachal Pradesh. Apart from jobs in the state sector, there is little employment with the result that many males – especially the younger ones – leave for the cities, mostly outside the state, to make a living.



An increase in fallow land in the vicinity is the result. From an ecological point of view, the above described scenario results in increased flooding and landslides during the monsoon season as well as parched land and dust clouds during the dry season – an ideal recipe for erosion. The water quality and irrigation in the region are also poor.

* The name 'Tashi Jong' means 'Auspicious happy medicine village'

Reforestation for Medicine

Improve personal health

- production of traditional Tibetan medicine which is less expensive and has less side effects than allopathic medicine
- provision of a healthier environment through better water quality
- dissemination of traditional Tibetan medicinal knowledge



Social development

- creation of employment for the local Indian community
- reduction of rural migration to the cities
- provision of education for the local population
- promotion of greater cross-cultural acceptance between Indians and Tibetans

Beside the local benefits which would result from this project, some of the profit arising from medicine production would be transferred to the Nub Gon Monastery, whose abbot is the Ven. Tulku Popa . The monastery is located in Chinese-occupied Eastern Tibet, where the Tibetan way of life is suppressed. However no donations towards this project will be given directly to Nub Gon Monastery – only the proceeds from the medicine project.

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Initial measures to be taken

In order to embark on the planned program of reforestation, numerous plots of land presently owned by various small farmers need to be purchased so as to provide an area sustainable enough to be planted with indigenous herbs, bushes and saplings. The purchase of the land will not be to the detriment of the present landowners.

A yogi doctor in Tashi Jong has recognized more than 25 species of flora growing locally – some nearing extinction – which could be used for medicinal purposes. Seeds and saplings will have to be bought where they cannot be sourced from existing plants on the community's land.

The local irrigation system needs to be refined, so as to make best use of rainfall and optimize the supply of locally available water resources.

Hedges or fencing need to be planted to enclose the plots from freely wandering cattle and goats. Non-aggressive measures will be employed to control termites. A future workforce will need schooling in order to look after the herbal flora in an appropriate way. The plantation itself will serve as a reference source for those wishing to preserve Tibetan medicinal knowledge for the future.

Implemented steps

For testing purposes, a small plot of land was purchased in 2003 and planted with six varieties of medicinal plants.

Since the acquisition period for learning traditional Tibetan medicinal knowledge is lengthy, a young Tibetan has been sent to a nearby Tibetan school of medicine to acquire the basic medicinal knowledge which will need to be intensified through teachings from an elderly Tibetan doctor and Tashi Jong resident – the Venerable Yogi Semdor.

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In April 2004 a young Indian student, Ms Bhakti Mehta, from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai dedicated a four-week internship to the project, during which she conducted a needs analysis and made contacts for the future progress of the project.

To meet the legal requirements and to set up adequate organizational facilities, a non-profit organization has been established under Indian law. On the financial front, a business plan has been set up and a honorary financial advisor has been found.



Local responsibility - Friends of Nub Gon Monastery®

'Friends of Nub Gon Monastery' is a non-profit organization registered on 7 October 2002 under Indian Society's Act 21, from the year 1860 (registration no. 4035/2002). Initially founded in 2002 to support a local incense production project (see below), the society's objective is to provide all necessary support – financial and otherwise – to the initiator and director of the project, the Ven. Tulku Popa in all project-related matters. The name of the society honours the monastery of the Ven. Tulku Popa in Eastern Tibet.

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Quality control

In the production of good medicine, quality control is of utmost importance. Although the reforestation and medicine production project is to be undertaken in the so called third world, the long-established medicinal traditions of India and Tibet should not be underestimated. The incense project is exemplary in how monastic discipline has been implemented in the production of high quality products.

By growing the necessary flora in Tashi Jong under the guidance of a Tulku, doubts relating to chemical or other contamination of the raw materials will be eliminated. Likewise the utilization of desired harvesting and storage techniques will also be guaranteed.

Estimated costs

To enable the project to be realized, funding will need to be divided into three phases:

1. purchase of land and planting materials, enclosure and preparation of land for planting, improving of irrigation system, planting of seed and saplings, education of a Tibetan in traditional medicine.
Projected time frame: 1 year
2. plantation maintenance during growth stage, continued education of Tibetan in traditional Tibetan medicine.
Projected time frame: 4 years
3. purchase of site and construction of premises for medicine production, establishing sales distribution network, training workers in production of different medicines.
Projected time frame: 1 year

Since the first phase will be the most cost-intensive, it is extremely important to source sufficient funding as soon as possible, to enable the project to be launched.

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Estimated costs

Phase 1

Purchase of land	EUR	80.000
Acquisition of bushes, saplings and seeds	EUR	2.000
Enclosure of the land plot and preparation of the site for plantation	EUR	4.000
Labour costs for planting of saplings and seeds	EUR	2.000
Improving of irrigation system	EUR	6.000
Education of a Tibetan in traditional medicine	EUR	250

Phase 2

Training of workers in plantation maintenance	EUR	1.000
Labour costs for maintenance over 4 years	EUR	8.000
Further education of Tibetan in traditional medicine	EUR	750

Phase 3

Establishing medicine production (acquisition and building of premises for production and packaging, purchase of tools)	EUR	40.000
Training of workers in manufacturing of different medicines	EUR	2.000
Labour costs for production, packaging and distribution of medicine	EUR	2.000
Marketing	EUR	1.000

Annual expenses over four years (per annum)

Organisation and administration	EUR	1.000
Miscellaneous	EUR	600

TOTAL COSTS **EUR 150.600**

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Donation details

Dear Reader

Thank you very much for your interest in our project. For further details on the reforestation and medicine project in Tashi Jong, please contact the

Ven. Tulku Popa by eMail on

LamaChodpa@rediffmail.com

Please be assured that your donation will only be used for the purposes described in this brochure. Since we work at local level and not in connection with any large aid organization, administration costs are and will be kept to a minimum. This brochure for example, has been compiled by voluntary workers.

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Donations can be made
via Germany to:

Reference:

Bank:

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Ereignis Odin e.V.

Wiederaufforstung (reforestation)

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We will supply you with certification for donations, as is stipulated
under Indian law.

