



ICDF Tsharka School Newsletter

February 19, 2015 – No. 1

Happy Losar! Tibetan New Year is being celebrated from February 19 -21, 2015. This is year 2142 on the Tibetan calendar and the animal of this year is the female wood sheep or goat, depending on which translation to English is used. This is the most important holiday in the Tibetan year – and we are happy to celebrate the beginning of this promising New Year with our Tibetan friends.

On the occasion of the New Year, I would like to bring all of you who have supported Tsharka School up to date on our progress there during the past year.

Tsharka School had an especially good year in 2014! After several years of declining student attendance and poor attention to the school facilities, Tsharka School is once again operating effectively. Our new school staff is responsible for these positive developments.

Renewed Village Commitment

In December 2013, I traveled to Kathmandu and spent a number of days in meetings with the villagers of Dolpo. By the end of the meetings, the villagers recommitted themselves to the continuation of Tsharka School, supported by ICDF, as it had been since we founded the school in 2004. Leona Mason, co-founder of Tsharka School, agreed to continue her support.

A new generation of villagers, young men and women now in their 20s and 30s, expressed their excitement about teaching at Tsharka School. There was no school in Tsharka when they were young, so they were all educated elsewhere in Nepal or in India. Some of these young people attended government-operated schools, others attended monastery-operated schools. This new generation of Tsharka villagers banded together

and formed a Student Union. The older generation of Tsharka villagers agreed to give the governance of Tsharka School to the Student Union. (As of November 2014, the Student Union is officially organized as a Nepali non-profit organization named Dolpo Tomorrow.)

After many hours of conversation, I decided to hire four members of the Student Union as new staff to operate Tsharka School for ICDF. Samdup, a monastery-educated three-year veteran of teaching at Tingyu School, a valley in Dolpo above Tsharka, is our new School Coordinator and Tibetan language teacher. Tsewang Wangmo, a government-educated teacher, who previously taught math at Saldang School in Dolpo, is our new math and science teacher. Tsering Angmo, also a government-educated teacher, who has taught English at Tsharka School in the past, returned to teach English and other subjects. Thukpen, educated in a monastery, completed a basic training course in Kathmandu in Montessori methods, and focuses on early childhood education at Tsharka School.

When Samdup and the other teachers arrived in Tsharka the last week of April in 2014, they found the school in a shambles. Quickly, Samdup organized a work party and about forty villagers showed up to repair the school. They tore down and rebuilt the courtyard wall, shored up a broken ceiling timber in one of the classrooms, and re-plastered classroom walls and ceilings. They cleaned out the office and reorganized the school furniture and supplies. The next day, the teachers themselves cleaned out the kitchen and repaired the greenhouse.



The Student Body

This year's student body can be divided into two groups: children who could attend school regularly and students who were unable to attend regularly. Those who could attend regularly followed a rigorous program in order to complete a year's worth of study in the six months that constitute the school year in Tsharka – and the rest of Dolpo. Those students who could not attend regularly were welcomed to the school and were either allowed to sit in on classes, or given special individualized instruction. All together, thirty-seven children attended Tsharka School in 2014.



Education for Girls

Among the students who attended Tsharka School on a regular basis this year, only two were girls. By contrast, the majority of the students who could only attend on an irregular basis were girls: twelve out of seventeen. These students were older than the other students.

According to Samdup, our School Coordinator, “In Nepal and especially in remote villages like Dolpo, girls do not get opportunity to study. For the parents, girls’ education seems far less important than the education of boys. They mainly used their girls to help them in their working field until they are ready to send in another family as a bride. My own sister, she denied me to send her daughter to school. I tried to convince her. But she told me that what would happen to their goats and sheep if they send their girl to school, and if goats and sheep are not, they will starve. It is very difficult to convince the villagers, but I hope after some time in future they will realize it.”

When Leona and ICDF founded Tsharka School in 2004, we insisted that at least half of the children enrolled in the school be girls. We understand local prejudice against

educating girls. However, it is clear that the girls of Tsharka are hungry for education. Even though they have responsibilities at home, and they face other road-blocks along the way, the girls in Tsharka do want to learn how to read and write. They want to learn more about the way the world works. So even if they could only attend school on an irregular basis, they showed up when they could.

It is ICDF's and Tsharka School's special responsibility to offer instruction to the girls of Tsharka village. We are very pleased that two of the four teachers at Tsharka School are young women from Tsharka village. Tsewang Wangmo and Tsering Wangmo provide invaluable role models to the girls who attend school as often as their families allow. We are working to encourage local families to let their daughters attend school more often. It will take time, but we hope that next year, we will be able to report that more girls spent more days in school than in 2014. We are also able to provide special attention to the girls who attend when they can. The goal for these students is not necessarily to pass standard examinations. Their goals can be set individually, but our basic goal is literacy – teaching girls the traditional three “Rs”: reading, writing, and ‘rithmetic – until the girls may become regularly enrolled students.

The School Year

In his end-of-year report, Samdup explained:

“The academic session starts from May 1st to October 31. It is totally of six months except 15 days holiday of the yartsa gunbu (herb). This year we started the School on May 5th. Five days delayed just because of some meetings, repairing and cleaning the School. In a previous letter I wrote you that we started the school on May 1st. that was to mean that we started working in the school from May 1st. We finished the meetings, repairing/cleaning, preparing the classrooms, and preparing the kitchen (provisions of the mess), and the admitting of the students within five days (from May 1st to 5th). From May 5th, we started the classes as set daily routine. In the end of the session, we finished the final examination on 28th October. On 30th October we have a whole day picnic for the students and on October 31 we held the result announcement program and closed the school till next year school session.

We taught six different subjects which were Nepali, English, Tibetan, Science, Social and Math. On addition to that, we also had an extra activity class in the end of the school each day. In the activity class we did singing, dancing, drawing, games and general knowledge, and often talked about sanitation and health. All of the above subjects are according to the Nepal's academic rules of primary school except the Tibetan Language. But we are allowed to teach our local language too. We taught Science and Math in English language and Social Study in Nepali language. (All the other government schools in Nepal are Nepali medium schools. They teach all the subjects in Nepali language except an English language class. But schools in Dolpo are unlike other government school. They teach major subjects in English language.)

In the end of the session we had a whole day picnic for the students. We thought it was good if we can manage a picnic for the students. Since we didn't have a separate budget for that, we cooked everything from our own mess. The students were only told to bring some potatoes. We gave them breakfast, lunch and a noodle in the evening before they left the school. We also gave them tea and fruit juice. We bought a goat for the meat. Half of the meat we used for the picnic and other half was used for the guests who were invited for the result announcement program, later. The school was decorated colorfully and a music system was also set. I hoped they enjoyed the party that day.

The result announcement program was held on 31 October. We set a half-day program of games competitions, singing and dancing show, and the result announcement. We invited a senior monk of Chhark as the chief guest who was available that time in Chharka. We gave small rewards to those students who got in the position of 1st, 2nd and third in examination and in games competitions, and also to those who performed the singing and dancing shows.“



The Future: 2015 and Beyond

Samdup provided an overview of the total number of children in Tsharka village and their educational opportunities: of the approximately 180 school-age children in Tsharka, about 60 are sent to school in monasteries or government schools, either in Nepal or India. Almost 40 children attended Tsharka School this year, either on a regular or irregular basis. Thus, there are 80 children in Tsharka who were not in school anywhere this year.

When Tsharka School was built in 2005, with the assistance of Room to Read, we anticipated a student body of 60. Now, we should be raising our sights and working towards a goal of reaching 80 children or more. We will approach this goal on a step-by-step basis. Nepali government funds to improve the school building facilities are extremely limited. We have applied to the government, but we are number 17 in applications for support. Next year's government funds will only pay for two projects. We will need to find a way to make improvements in the school building without relying on government funds.

Next year, we hope to increase our student body to the 60 students for which the school building was designed. In following years, we hope to continue to develop and expand the outreach of Tsharka School. Ideally, all school-age children in Tsharka should eventually be enrolled in school.

Samdup concluded his report with his thoughts on the future for Tsharka School:

“Chhark Bhot Primary School is the only school that exists in Chharka [Tsharka] village. And it is hundred percent sure that if we can upgrade the quality of the school and make it like other schools in Dolpo, Chharka [Tsharka] people will gain enough confidence for the school and send their children to their own village school instead of sending them in far way schools and monasteries. This year after seeing our performance the villagers felt very happy, the parents started to feel some confidence for the school. Many of the parents told us that they have never seen the school function as properly as it functioned this year. The students that we have this year will come back next year too. There is no reason for them to withdraw. And on addition to that I am sure more families will send their children to the school.”



WE NEED YOUR HELP!

In order to keep Tsharka School functioning – and to improve the facilities and increase our outreach, especially to girls – we need your continued financial support.

Thank you for your generous contributions in 2014! Tsharka School is up and running and working hard! Our goal is \$15,000 for 2015 to pay for teachers' salaries and teaching materials and make improvements to the school.

Help us get started now!

It is easy to donate to ICDF on our website at <http://www.icfdn.org>. There is a PayPal button on the site, or you can donate using a credit card, check or bank transfer.

Thank you for helping the children of Tsharka!

Tashi Delek,
Barbara Euser
President, ICDF