

Spring 2007

ISSUE 3



Lo Kunphen

Newsletter

After an immense amount of bureaucracy and effort, this year has finally seen the establishment of Lo Kunphen as a registered vocational school under the national Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT). Lo Kunphen is now the only institution in Nepal offering the formal qualifications known as Kanjinpa (equivalent to an Assistant Health Worker) and Durapa (equivalent to a Community Medical Assistant - the nearest thing to a doctor that most rural villages have immediate access to). For the students this means that their studies will now give them recognised status alongside government community health workers. The school also takes every opportunity to enable the students to learn additional skills to complement their knowledge of amchi medicine. For example, some of the senior girls undertook an intensive three-day informal course on safe motherhood, learning the basics of safe pregnancy and childbirth (nutrition and hygiene), how to recognise the danger signs that indicate a pregnant woman needs specialised help, and how to access that help. This is important as many mothers die in childbirth in these remote areas. Another group studied massage therapies with a practitioner in Kathmandu. These skills can be combined with use of herbal medicines. In March the first group of students will take the first year CTEVT exams, along with the mainstream class 10 exam. This senior group of nine students has already been doing clinical practice for two years at three village clinics established with funding from Drokpa, a US based charity (For more details about Drokpa, see their website: www.drokpa.org). The regular running costs of Lokunphen are funded by KINOE (Kids in Need of Education), a British charity (website: www.kinoe.org), with a number of caring individuals contributing additional amounts.

Lo Kunphen is concerned about conservation issues, and is working to raise awareness locally about sustainable management and harvesting of the medicinal herbs, and to introduce and plant more herbs. They have established a small museum at the school and a greenhouse. The theme for this third Lo Kunphen newsletter is the environment, with students of the top classes, who are nearing the end of their studies, writing something about the medicinal plants of Mustang and the environment of Pokhara, the lowland town where they have their winter school when it is too cold to study in upper Mustang.

If you would like more information or to offer support, please contact KINOE via Helen McMahon in UK (helen@mcmahon.co.uk) or Cherry Bird (cherrybird@wlink.com.np) or Amina Bomzan (aminabomzan@gmail.com), both of whom are based in Nepal.

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My aim in life

Rinzin Wangmo Bista, Class 10

Everyone should have an aim in life. A person without an aim is like a day without sun or a bird without wings. My aim is to become a Tibetan doctor (amchi) because my principal is an amchi and I see that he helps a lot of sick people in Mustang and I also want to be like him. Love and compassion is the root of religion, so I study hard. But I may have some problems in the future because the medicine plants are used by villagers for grazing animals, so they are disappearing. We need to protect these plants as they only grow in the Himalayan region.



Introduction to herbal medicines

Chhime Dhorje Gurung, Class 10

Herbal medicines are made from plants and are based on the five elements of wind, water, earth, fire and sky. Human beings also come from these five elements. Herbal medicine is a natural way to heal diseases, which are caused by imbalances of phlegm, wind and bile in the body. The medicines are made from plants which grow in different places and under different conditions, on hills or in fields, at high or low altitudes, in sunny or rainy places. They have different effects depending on where they grow. The medicines are effective and easy to get and do not have side effects like modern drugs. They work slowly to cure diseases and make the body strong. These medicines are the natural gift to us.



A good environment produces good plants

Chhoedak Gurung, Class 10

Green plants grow everywhere, some in hilly places, some in plains and some in water, all have their own habitat. Some grow near cities, like Pokhara and Kathmandu, but these are not effective for medicines because they do not get clean air and clear sun because of the chemical pollution caused by the cities. The plants of Mustang are very effective because there is no pollution and they get pure air and lots of sun to make their food, so we can say a good environment produces effective plants.

How Amchi tradition came to be known in the world

Sonam Dukgyal Gurung, Class 10

In Asia, many thousands of years ago, the Amchi tradition was found among only a few groups of people, and the knowledge was not much developed. After the Buddha meditated for four years in India and received enlightenment, he began teaching his disciples in India about religion and the use of simple herbal medicines for relieving the suffering of sick people. Soon knowledge of Amchi medicine spread all over the region, including India, China, Tibet and Mongolia, but most especially Tibet, where some people studied the subject very deeply. Some of these people became great Amchis and were called 'the nine most intelligent people of Tibet'. Among them, Yuthok Ngingma Gonpo was the greatest, studying with many different teachers in India. In Tibet he organised a conference at a place called Samye and established an amchi school, with over 300 students, at a place called Kongpo. These students graduated at different levels and became highly respected, especially one who became known as Yuthok Sarpa (a new Yuthok) and they helped to develop amchi skills all over Tibet. Now even today we respect the medicine Buddha and Yuthok Sarpa.

Apelipse Dhoge

Tsering Wangyal, Class 10

This plant is a very important source of medicine for treating specific diseases of the brain and bone and for people who have had accidents. It is quite rare and grows only in very high areas, above 4,000 metres, and where the soil is stony, so it is difficult to find, especially these days as its numbers have become less so it may soon become extinct. It flowers for only seven to nine days and the period of its growth is only 25 to 45 days. All parts of the plant are used by amchis - flowers, roots, leaves and seeds. The situation of this plant is very serious and we amchis need to protect the areas where it grows with fences, so that the cattle cannot graze it. We should pick only 25% of what is growing so it can still grow next year. We can also plant more of it in suitable areas.



Tikta

Thikme Bahadur Gurung, Class 10

This is a small plant found in summer in the Himalayas. Its name means bitter, because it has a bitter taste. It grows at about 3,700 metres altitude and can be used to treat headaches and colds, mixed with other herbs. This plant is disappearing from most parts of Nepal because people do not realise how important it is and they allow their animals to graze it. In Mustang district we are trying to protect our medicine plants and stop people destroying them



How we can conserve Himalayan plants?

Karma Wongdue, Class 10

Many many years ago a lot of plants were found in the Himalayan region, such as kurki, ligador, bonkar, mani, ruta, chawa, raning, narsing and epilipsi. These are very important and only grow in high places, at least 2,000 to 3,000 metres above sea level. But now, day by day, these plants are decreasing, due to ignorance of people about how useful they are in our lives. If we do not protect these plants then one day they will surely be lost from the world and the coming generation will not be able to see them. Therefore we should realise the importance of these plants for making medicine. There are two ways to conserve them. We can try to take cuttings and plant them in many different areas, or we can cultivate them in fields and protect them from grazing animals. The greatest problem I have seen is people collecting these plants in large quantities to sell and export to China, Tibet and India. So now they are becoming extinct and we amchis have difficulty finding them for making our medicines. This also means the number of amchis will decrease since they cannot afford to buy herbs from other countries for making medicines. So preservation of amchi skills and conservation of medicinal plants must go together so that the coming generation can have amchi treatment.



Winter school in Pokhara

Tenzin Dharphe, Class 8

Since our home in Upper Mustang is very cold in winter we come to Pokhara for our winter school. Pokhara is quite beautiful, with views of the Himalayas and it is much cleaner than Kathmandu. Kathmandu is very dirty and polluted, but these days Pokhara is also becoming polluted. Everywhere there is waste thrown, such as bottles and plastic. If the population keeps growing Pokhara will become even more polluted and there will be a great loss of natural resources and beautiful environment.

Winter school

Pema Dolma Bista, Class 8

We are all very happy to have the chance to learn at winter school in Pokhara, especially as we do not have to work in the fields or in our homes like we do in Mustang. We only have to study. If there was no winter school we would forget everything we learned during the summer, so we are very thankful to our sponsor for giving us this opportunity. However, compared with Mustang Pokhara seems to be very polluted due to many people coming down from the high hills to settle. Now there is a lack of clean pure water for drinking and there are petrol fumes in the air.

Lo Kunphen at Pokhara

Pema Yangdon, Class 8

Our winter school in Pokhara is a very strange experience for us because the weather is so different than Mustang, where it is very cold. I like Pokhara, but we also sometimes feel very uneasy because of the noise and pollution, especially when we visit Kathmandu. Lo Kunphen is a very special school and I am happy to study there, the teachers are like our friends. I want to give my hands to helping people who need health care, by using local medicines.

