

STOP PRESS!

We have just this week received word that two more tent schools have opened in the vicinity of Muqu village. These are fully indigenous initiatives. However, additional external funding can help improve general living conditions, quality of education and the schools' capacity to accommodate students. This development is extremely exciting because it demonstrates clearly the importance of modelling and local ownership.



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New Beginnings in Tibet

These are exciting times for us! Plateau Perspectives' Board of Directors has already grown to include an engineer, doctor, accountant, chemist and geographer, and clear progress is being made toward our formal application for charity status with the Canadian government. In China, our fulltime staff – Marc and Marion (Torrance) Foggin – have recently moved to Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, where they are currently studying Kham Tibetan. From there, they continue to work with the local government and Upper Yangtze Organization (UYO) leaders in the source area of the Yangtze River in southwest Qinghai Province. At the same time, they are actively seeking out what needs and opportunities exist in the TAR for other integrated conservation and development work.

Yaqu Village Tent School, One Year Later...

After many months of discussion between our counterpart organization (the Upper Yangtze Organization) and local village leaders, a tent school was finally established in Yaqu by the villagers themselves in Fall 1999. Now, one year later, around 70 nomad children are attending this community school. (Some external funding was provided by a British children's charity). The new hope that has begun to emerge in this remote part of the Tibetan plateau may provide the basis for Plateau Perspectives' future partnership with several nomad communities in the region. Many plans are now being made.



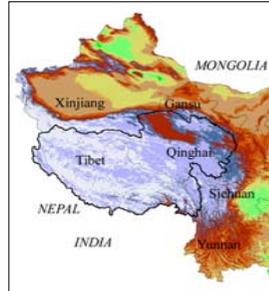
School children in Yaqu village

Development on the Tibetan plateau

There are now over 50 international non-governmental organisations working in the Tibetan plateau region. How can, and indeed how *should*, Plateau Perspectives be different from other organisations? Although there will necessarily be some common ground between different NGOs working in the area, we have chosen above all to focus simultaneously on five main themes:

- To *integrate* conservation and development work
- To consider *local cultures* and *local knowledge*
- To promote *sustainability* in all fields of work
- To implement *replicable models* of development
- To build long-lasting *partnerships* with communities

We seek especially to promote an *integrated approach* to development (e.g., integration of education, health and environmental protection at the community level). Geographically, our work is situated in the headwaters of four great Asian rivers: the Yellow, Yangtze, Mekong and Salween rivers. This region is in the centre of the Tibetan plateau and is populated by Tibetan nomadic pastoralists – a high priority for China in its new “Western Development Scheme.”



The Tibetan Plateau

Muqu Village Tent School Now Established

Although discussions began a lot earlier with the community of Muqu, and a real sense of hope had been expressed as early as Summer 1998 (i.e., hope for improving local quality of life as well as for being involved in the overall process of change), it took up until late 2000 for the community to agree on the specific plans for the establishment of their own tent school. County government and UYO leaders facilitated the final negotiations, and UYO leaders made all the necessary purchases with most of the external funding coming from Plateau Perspectives.

Now, for the first time, around 20 children in this nomad community are learning to read and write Tibetan as well as how to count. The teaching soon will also incorporate health and environmental issues. The boys and girls are living in two dormitory tents while the teacher has his own small yurt (a Mongolian-style tent). Classes are held in two larger yurts.

This school is the first step in the Upper Yangtze Organization’s plan to establish an *Integrated Community Development Centre* in Muqu village to help demonstrate ways of improving the community’s well-being (e.g., health, education, income) and to find more sustainable ways of utilizing the local natural resources (e.g., rangeland management, ecotourism). To this end, the government has allocated some grassland to the UYO (approx. 130 km²) with a plan to develop this land sustainably according to an integrated masterplan currently being designed jointly by Plateau Perspectives, the UYO, and China’s national Biodiversity Working Group.

Who are the people of Muqu?

One elderly woman from Muqu tells her story:

“I was born east of here. I’m now 78 years old. Because we were so poor, my father brought my family here to hunt wildlife. We weren’t nomads (herders) like we are now, but hunters. I don’t remember exactly where we lived, but we joined a group of around 20 people and we all lived and hunted together. We didn’t have yak hair tents because we didn’t raise any yak or sheep as livestock. Instead we lived in a leather house made of wild yak skins. The people in these mountains, those that we joined, they were from the Yora tribe. They’re not Buddhist like other people in the east. I remember my father shooting wild yak right from the door of our house. Wild yak were everywhere, we never had to go far to shoot them, and there was a lot of other wildlife too. No one had metal knives back then, and there were very few sewing needles, maybe only one in the whole group. Some stones were also used as knives. ...



Nomad family in Muqu village

After Liberation, my father and I had to move back east in the late 1950s. When we left everybody was crying, but not because we would never see each other again. Everyone cried because they still couldn’t make knives themselves – my father had made all of the community’s knives for over three decades. ... Many years later I moved back to this same place, this time with a family of my own. That was when the commune was established, around 1973. We now live in the 4th section of Muqu village, the last one to be created. Nobody wanted to move here because of the cold, but we didn’t have any choice. Now this is my home again.”

Village Tent School Initiative

Why are we focusing on providing assistance to help establish tent schools in nomad areas of the Tibetan plateau? The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has shown that the provision of mobile services for education, literacy, health and other areas of development may be one of the best ways to improve the overall quality of life for many nomad groups. Village tent schools can also become the focus for community involvement in a variety of other development initiatives.



Tibetan mother and child in Qinghai

Plateau Perspectives has designed this particular project to increase access to education in several remote nomad communities in Qinghai and Tibet. Specifically, we are aiming to encourage around ten communities to establish local tent schools, similar to those already established in Yaqu and Muqu villages. Each tent school will cost approx. \$10,000 CDN (or \$6,500 USD; 4,500 GBP), plus some overhead costs. This project will continue over a period of three years. Please feel free to contact us for more information.