

Project Summary: *The Tibetan regions have one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world; therefore improving women's health is critical to improve the health situation in Tibetan society overall. Tibetan Healing Fund is establishing the Tibetan Natural Birth and Health Training Center, the first of many rural health facilities in Rebkong (Malho) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, mSo-Ngon Province (Ch: Qinghai). The center will save the lives of women and children by providing safe, affordable, linguistically and culturally appropriate health services and health education. The center will also serve as a training facility for community midwives and health educators and a resource center for women to learn about personal and family health and nutrition.*

Project Goals:

To provide good quality and access to safe, affordable, linguistically and culturally appropriate health services, medicines and health education. The center will also serve as a training facility for community midwives and health educators and a resource center for women to learn about personal and family health and nutrition. THF will accomplish this goal by:

Health Services

- ❖ Increasing accessibility to culturally and linguistically appropriate health care services for rural Tibetan women and newborns.
- ❖ Increasing the number of safe deliveries.
- ❖ Increasing the number of rural women receiving pre-natal, post-natal and neonatal care.
- ❖ Decreasing risk of death and disability from hemorrhage, eclampsia, obstructed labor and infection.
- ❖ Providing family planning education and services.
- ❖ Providing delivery kits for safe home births.
- ❖ Increasing access to essential drugs of Tibetan and western medicine.
- ❖ Providing management for complications and safe transport for emergencies related to pregnancy and childbirth.

Training Services

- ❖ Increasing the number of trained village Community Midwives to assist safe delivery and arrange for emergency transport if complications arise.
- ❖ Increasing the numbers of village Health Educators.
- ❖ Increasing rural women's knowledge of physiology, women's health, family health, hygiene, nutrition, infectious disease, such as HIV/AIDS and TB and disease prevention.

Problem Statement:

Tibetan women and infants are at high risk for birth-related deaths. For a rural Tibetan mother to survive a complicated delivery, or for a child to live, is to beat the odds. In Tibet, the obstacles to a healthy birth, for the mother and child, are among the greatest in the world. Maternal mortality is the leading cause of death for women of reproductive age in Tibet and most villagers know at least one woman who has died from childbirth. In the Rebkong regions where Tibetan Healing Fund works an estimated 96% of the Tibetan women give birth at home, of these women 95% delivered without the assistance of any medical professional or birthing attendants.

Because of lack of access to health care, finances, language barriers and health care infrastructure, the majority of births take place in cold environments without access to electricity or running water and often at high altitude. And, although theoretically free, the average cost of a normal delivery in a hospital is nearly four times the average per capita income with payment for care due upon admission. In addition, vehicles are rarely available, roads often treacherous or impassible, and language and cultural barriers alienating.

Project Activities:

The Birth Center will provide rural Tibetans with access to pre-natal care including ultrasound technology, labor and delivery support including skilled assistance for normal delivery and appropriate referral for women with



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obstetric complications; postnatal care including care of the newborn and breastfeeding support; community midwife and health educator training; family health education; essential Tibetan and Western medicines; delivery kits for safe home births. Training sessions and health education on women's health, family nutrition, sanitation, hygiene and disease prevention including sexually transmitted infections, TB, and HIV/AIDS.

The Birth Center will integrate Tibetan medical system and Tibetan culture and traditions with western interventions. This integrative and comprehensive approach utilizes biomedicine, ethno medicine and folk health systems to formulate interventions to improve the safe delivery and health of rural Tibetans. Some of the cultural services include celebration of births, child naming, and earring celebrations according to Tibetan medicine and local traditions.

The Birth Center's management team is collaborating with the Rebkong County and Prefecture Health Bureau on this project; the Health Bureau and County Planning Department monitor the quality of the Birth Center's construction. Standards of care and operations will be governed by a set of protocols designed to ensure high standards of health services and training. The long term vision for the Birth Center is to foster self reliance and a full transition within 10 years to oversight by local staff and community advisory committee and stakeholders in order to build a stronger sustainable health facility for the region. The center will serve as a model facility and one that can be replicated in other areas of need.

Long-term Impact:

The Tibetan Natural Birth and Health Training Center has the potential to be the cornerstone of a healthy Tibetan community. The Birth Center will provide pre-natal, delivery and post delivery care, access to Tibetan and western essential medicines as well as valuable education about women's health, family nutrition, sanitation, hygiene and disease prevention including sexually transmitted infections, TB, and HIV/AIDS.

For the long-term, Tibetan Healing Fund's local and international experts will be working with the Rebkong Tibetan Natural Birth and Health Training Center to establish a surveillance system; yearly collection of health information data and performance appraisals of the Birth Center and Community Midwives will be conducted in order to improve the health care services and to provide further development of appropriate facilities. Tibetan Healing Fund's Tibetan Natural Birth and Health Training Center can save lives of rural Tibetan women and babies and decrease the risk of disability caused by unsafe and unassisted delivery.

Timeline:

The Tibetan Natural Birth and Health Training Center opened for full services in July 2009.