

Project Summary: Tibetan Healing Fund along with local medical professionals determined that the most pressing need for Tibetan women in the rural villages is to have access to a community midwife, health educator and culturally appropriate health education materials. Tibetan Healing Fund trains rural Tibetan women to become community midwives, bringing healthcare and education to rural Tibetan women and their families.

Project Goals:

- ❖ Increase the number of village level community midwives able to assist safe delivery and arrange for emergency transport if complications arise.
- ❖ Increase the number of rural women receiving pre-natal, post-natal and neonatal care.
- ❖ Increase rural women's knowledge of physiology, women's health, family health, hygiene, nutrition, HIV/AIDS and disease prevention.
- ❖ Integrate Tibetan medicine theory and Tibetan culture and traditions with western interventions.

Project Need and Beneficiaries:

Tibetan Healing Fund conducted a preliminary needs assessment in 2002 and a follow-up assessment in 2003. These led to the creation of the Community Midwife training, an important component of Tibetan Healing Fund's work.

Tibetan women and infants are at a high risk for birth related deaths. Because there are few midwives in rural villages, 96% of women gave birth at home, of these women, 95% delivered without the assistance of a trained health personnel. Many women deliver their babies alone. Conditions are often unsanitary and if complications arise there is little hope of recovery for either the mother or child. The majority of births take place at high altitude, cold environments without access to electricity and running water. Hospital care is prohibitively expensive, roads are often impassible, language barriers and the current rural health system does not address the needs of pregnant women and newborns care. The average cost of a normal delivery is nearly four times the average per capita income and payment for hospital care is due upon admission to the hospital.

Project Activities:

Community midwives were chosen based on their age and personal experience, aptitude to learn, desire to help other village women, and ability to speak and read Tibetan and/or Chinese,

As a part of the training, the community midwife trainees shadow doctors in a prefecture hospital observing pre-natal check-ups, assisting with births and follow-up care. The community midwife course includes 45 days training (15 days training in class and 30 days training in clinics) of substantial information on women's physiology, basic hygiene, sanitation practices, disease prevention and nutrition. The women all received certificates of completion from the hospital.

The midwives also perform baby check-ups to make sure they remain well. Community midwives are trained to identify infants likely to develop serious problems and provide parents with basic health care information. They also promote immunizations, monitor growth rates and promote and support breastfeeding.

Long-term Impact:

Community midwife training will save the lives of rural Tibetan women and children and decrease the risk of disability as a result of unsafe and unassisted child delivery. Community midwives will become an integral part of their community and an integral part of the rural health system. Through additional training and continuous monitoring the community midwives will develop a high level of skill and knowledge to provide the best possible care for women in their village and surrounding villages.

Conducted Training Timeline:

Community Midwife Training in Trika County in November 2002. Community Midwife Training in Rebkong County in November 2004. Continued Education Training of all community midwives in November 2006.