

120,000 RMB needed to purchase 100 tents for earthquake-affected nomadic Tibetans to use while they harvest their primary source of income in remote and inaccessible areas of Yushu County later this month; some of the tents will be used for a health clinic and to provide shelter for monks in an affected monastery in the same region.

Project location



The project will serve four earthquake-stricken villages in [Zhong Da Township](#), one monastery, and one health clinic. The villages are Tongboda, Gye Ye, Yengeda, and Chokshida. The monastery and clinic and both located in Chokshida. Zhong Da Township is about 80 km northwest of Jiegu Town in Yushu Prefecture, Qinghai Province, China. Due to the poor quality of roads, it takes about two and a half hours to drive from Jiegu to Zhong Da. From Zhong Da Township to the provincial capital of Xining is about 830 km. The villages in Zhong Da are all within 30 km of the epicenter of the 7.1 magnitude earthquake that struck on April 14, 2010. They are among the most seriously damaged areas, and among the most inaccessible to relief operations.

Population

All population numbers include families who remained in the villages after the earthquake and exclude those who fled to Jiegu. As of May 3, when visits to the villages were conducted, at least half of the residents had left their villages to seek refuge in Jiegu. In Tongboda Village there are currently 25 families. In Gye Ye Village there are currently 11 families. In Yengeda there are 22 families. In Chokshida there are 30 families. At the Bumche monastery there are 185 monks. None of the monks left the monastery after the earthquake, though one was killed. At the Bumche clinic there are between 10 and 50 patients who seek medical attention each day.



Cash income

The main sources of income in the villages are medicinal [caterpillar fungus](#) (*cordyceps sinensis*, known in Chinese as *chongcao*; in Tibetan as *yartsa gunbu* or *yatsa gunbu*) and proceeds from the nomadic lifestyle, including yak butter, yak meat and mutton, and wool. Many of the items produced from yaks and sheep are used by the families themselves rather than sold. Some families also practice subsistence-level farming of barley to produce tsampa flour. Caterpillar fungus is the most important source of income, but it only grows for one month a year, usually between mid-May and mid-June. In the winter of 2009-2010 there was less snowfall than usual in the mountains. The decrease in snowmelt has most locals anticipating a poorer than average harvest of fungus. Each fungus sells for between 12-15 RMB and on average each household can earn 2000-3000 RMB over the course of the short picking season.

Problems faced by target community

This project will supply additional tents to the villages, Bumche Monastery, and the health clinic in Zhong Da Township. The tents are necessary for shelter during the upcoming caterpillar fungus picking season, so that local families are able to collect a large part of their yearly income, which comes from the sale of the fungus. The tents will also provide additional shelter for permanent residents of the villages and the monastery, as well as a place to dispense medical treatment at the health clinic.



Zhong Da Township was among the most affected by the 7.1 magnitude earthquake on April 14, 2010 that hit Yushu Prefecture about 30 km northwest of Jiegu Town. The villages in Zhong Da are directly northwest of Jiegu, which means that they felt the full force of the earthquake close to the epicenter. However, these villages are very difficult to access, so supplies and other forms of relief were slow to reach families in the area. The distance from Yushu by car is 80 km (though the road winds around mountains so the distance "as the crow flies" is less), but it takes two and half hours to drive along a poor dirt road that hews along the steep cliffs of the banks of the Yangtze River before turning into the mountains.

Almost one hundred percent of buildings in the four villages and at Bumche Monastery were either destroyed or damaged to the extent that they will eventually have to be demolished. The rebuilding process will be expensive and take many years. All of the residents still in these areas are now living in blue disaster tents provided by the Chinese government. The government provided one tent to each family of between four to ten people. At Bumche Monastery there are only twenty tents for 185 monks, which amounts to more than nine monks per tent.

While living in a tent is not ideal for these families, they are accustomed to hardship and do not complain. With almost the entire population of Jiegu Town and the surrounding area suddenly homeless, tents have become a scarce and valuable commodity. The government is only able to allocate one tent per family.

One tent per family is insufficient because each family will need an additional tent during the caterpillar fungus-picking season, from around mid-May to mid-June. Caterpillar fungus is a lucrative traditional medicine that is sold throughout China. The area around Yushu is one of the best environments for the naturally growing fungus, and for many years the families in Yushu Prefecture have depended on the sale of the fungus for a large part -- if not the majority -- of their yearly income. Outsiders are not allowed to pick the fungus, and the season is considered so important that local schools have a month-long holiday so that students can return home to help their families. The

fungus tends to grow at higher altitudes -- usually above 4,000 metres -- so the members of the families who are sent to pick the fungus must travel into the mountains and hike large distances to cover new ground every day -- often upwards of 20 km.



For this reason, almost all families owned Tibetan-style tents prior to the earthquake. These tents were buried and destroyed in the rubble of the houses during the earthquake. As of now, the families will not be able to provide shelter to the members who go to pick caterpillar fungus. Without tents, they will be unable to pick the fungus this year and will therefore lose out on a large part of their yearly income that they desperately need after having lost almost all of their possessions in the quake. What's more, they have no money with which to purchase a new tent in the foreseeable future, so if they do not have a tent this year, they might not have one next year either, or the year after.

Almost all men, some women, and older children in each family will leave the home to pick fungus, but some stay behind in the village: the elderly, women with children, and others who are needed around the village must stay. So the fungus pickers cannot simply take the single tent that was allocated by the government. For the time being, that tent is their long-term home. They will need another tent specifically for caterpillar season, to replace the tents they already owned for that purpose that were lost in the earthquake.

The Bumche Monastery and health clinic are also in need of tents, for different reasons. The monastery simply does not have enough tents to house 185 monks. The current arrangement in which at least 9 monks live in a 12 square metre tent is not tenable for the long term. The monks will need to live in the tents for at least six months and likely through the next winter before any shelters can be rebuilt. Because of its relatively small size and remote location as compared to larger local monasteries like the Jiegu Monastery, the Bumche Monastery has been largely overlooked in the relief effort so far.

As for the health clinic at Zhong Da, there are currently no tents to house patients (between 10 and 50) that arrive to seek medical attention, for injuries

associated with the earthquake and also for regular ailments. The clinic serves all of the villages in Zhong Da Township, and there is nowhere else for these patients to go. As of now, patients are treated on the ground in the open air, beneath a tree. The clinic needs at least two tents in which to treat patients.

Benefits

Provide housing for caterpillar fungus pickers

The tents will allow the members of each family who go to pick caterpillar fungus to have warm, safe shelter to protect them at altitudes of over 4500 metres. Even in the late spring, the nighttime temperature at these altitudes is often below freezing, and rain is common. The mobility of the tents will allow them to travel large distances of 20 km and more each day in search of the fungus.

Increase yearly income

The availability of tents will allow the families to collect extra income of up to 3,000 RMB during the 2010 caterpillar picking season, despite the effects of the April 14 earthquake that will make everything more difficult this summer. This income will allow families to purchase food, clothing, and other necessities, as well as to begin to offset the massive losses suffered in the earthquake. The tent will also be used in future seasons, helping to secure future income.

Avoid cost of new tent in the future

At this point, families have no means or money to buy their own tents. Prior to the earthquake, most families had their own traditional Tibetan-style tents that they had used for years. They will be able to use a disaster tent in lieu of a traditional tent for the next several years or until whenever they can afford to buy another tent. Many families will surely decide to simply use the disaster tent for as long as it is viable, saving them money that they will need to spend on vital necessities. Nomadic Tibetans tend to let nothing go to waste.

Add to the overall availability of shelter

The government provides one tent per family, which is adequate considering the widespread need in the Yushu area. However, having a second tent would help these families to alleviate the cramped conditions and lack of privacy of living in tents. Family members who were previously living in Jiegu Town, where shelter is more abundant, would be able to move back to their villages and help with the reconstruction effort. For the monks at Bumche Monastery, overall shelter will be increased by 50 percent, allowing the number of monks per tent to drop from 9 to 6 or 7.

Provide space for medical treatment

At the health clinic adjacent to the Bumche Monastery, tents will allow for patients to be treated inside the tents instead of outside on the

ground. They will be sheltered from the wind, dust, rain, and other elements. The doctors and nurses who work at the clinic will be able to store and safeguard their medicine and instruments more easily. The quality of care at the clinic will be rendered cleaner, more comfortable, and more effective.

Beneficiaries

The project will benefit the 88 families in four villages in Zhong Da Township. Each family has an average of six people, for an estimated total of 528 individuals. The project will also benefit 185 monks at the Bumche monastery and 10 to 50 patients daily at the family-run health clinic adjacent to Bumche monastery. The patients are all residents of Zhong Da Township.

Time frame

This project will take 11 days to complete. But people will still use the tents for living until they are able to rebuild their house again. And they could also use those tents every year when they pick caterpillar fungus.

1. Six days: order and buy tents from tent factory in Xining.
2. Two days: transfer the tents from Xining to Jiegu town in Yushu.
3. Two days: transfer the tents from Jiegu to Zhong Da villages.
4. One day: distribute tents to each family, monastery, and the clinic.

Project sustainability

This project will help these village people earn their primary annual income from picking the caterpillar fungus. Moreover, the benefit of owning an additional tent will extend well beyond a year. Having lost so much of their wealth and possessions in the earthquake, families will not be in a position to purchase a new tent next year without dipping into money that would otherwise go toward food, clothing, education, and other necessities. The tents will be used in subsequent years for fungus picking and various nomadic activities. When caterpillar season is over, families will continue to use their tents for shelter. It is anticipated that the earliest even provisional buildings will be available is late next autumn. The weather in the Yushu area turns cold early in the autumn, so the tents will help people to keep warm.

Budget

Item	Cost
Management fee	Zero
Tents (100 tents @ 1,100 RMB each)	110,000 RMB
Transportation from Xining to Jiegu	7000 RMB
Transportation from Jiegu to Zhong Da Township	3000 RMB
Total	120,000 RMB

Photos and local information courtesy of Tibetan Village Project.

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