



SUCCESS STORY

Library Brings Opportunity to Tibet

A public space for reading and learning on the Tibetan Plateau



Photo: Lodre Zangbo

The Zongta Library under construction.

“[People] see that their life can get better and better if they learn to read Tibetan.”

—Chuzan, Manager, 31

The nomadic district of Zongta is typical of communities on the Tibetan plateau. School attendance rates are low and illiteracy rates high, particularly among women. Local schools provide classes only through the 6th grade. Few students ever get that far. For education beyond primary level, families must send their children away from home—a rare occurrence in a society where every member of the family contributes to its support.

Despite Tibet’s long history of literacy, learning and formal knowledge have traditionally been limited to monastic circles. In recent years this group has grown to include an educated, urban elite. Rural populations, however have few opportunities to acquire books and other printed works, and have limited skills with which to use digital materials. Throughout China, libraries still serve as archives of stored books which are often difficult to access. Even in educational institutions, library books are often kept under lock and key with limited access for students.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), through Winrock International, responded to the need for access to books and continuing education by teaming up with a local NGO to open a community center and library in Zongta. The group renovated a suitable building, creating a center which includes a reading room, classrooms and an AV room for materials in other media, enabling it to serve as a multi-functional public space.

School children can read storybooks to supplement what they learn in school, young people can learn vocational skills and their parents can catch up on basic education. 9,000 people in the district have access to the library and at least 80 people are already benefiting from training in basic educational skills such as reading and math.

As a public space promoting reading and learning, the community center can be a source of inspiration to preserve Tibetan culture, improve job prospects and encourage continuing education for all of Zongta’s residents.