

## AID TO TIBETAN REFUGEES

### AN AGRICULTURAL COLONY IN NEPAL

In 1960 the Government of Nepal requested the International Committee of the Red Cross to lend assistance in order to attend to the besetting problem which arose from the arrival in that country of Tibetan refugees. In response, the ICRC decided, apart from other measures, to establish an agricultural colony in a high-land valley in central Nepal.

From September 1961, preparations were made for the installation of several hundred refugees at *Dhor Patan*, at an altitude of about 9,000 feet. This valley, which was inhabited only for the monsoon period by Nepalese, was to become the permanent home of the Tibetan nomad refugees. The following month a technical team arrived on the spot, sent out by the International Committee and comprising one doctor, two engineers, one foreman—accompanied by their wives—and two young agriculturists.

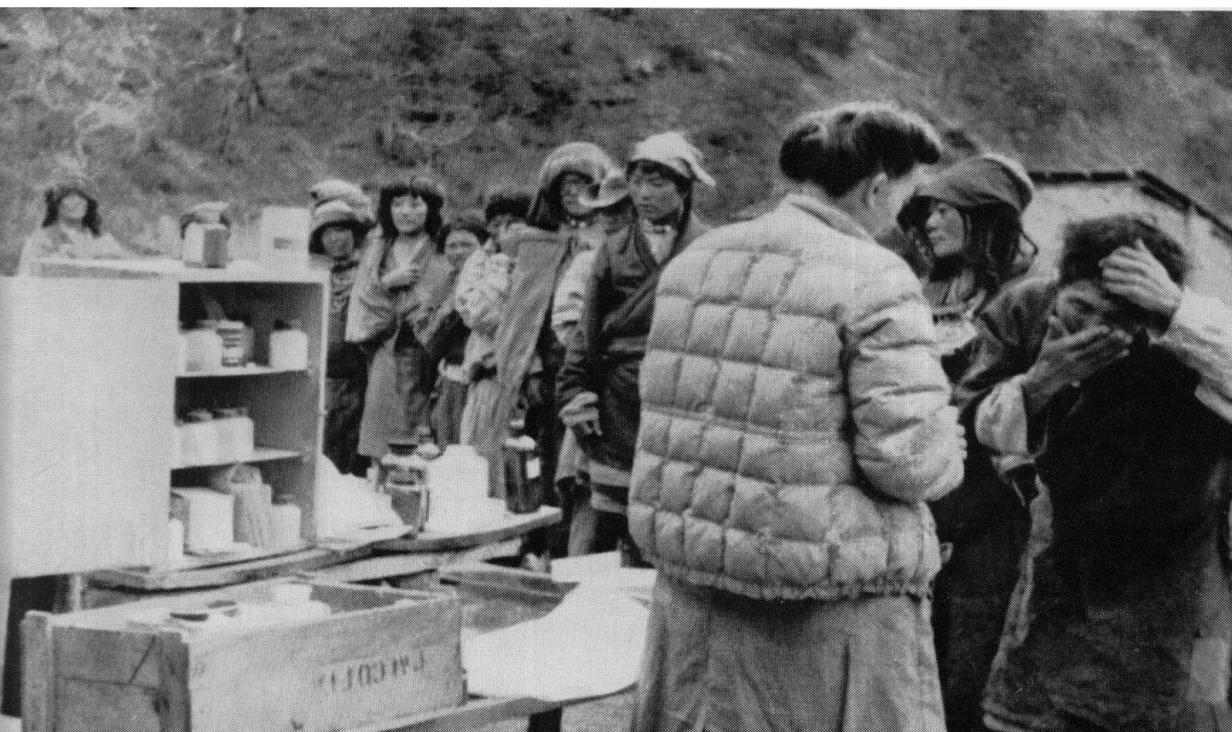
From the outset, almost insuperable problems arose. Due to the remoteness of the region and the scant means of access, communication was difficult and the arrival of refugees in much greater numbers than expected made provisioning exceedingly onerous. Moreover, the winter of 1961/62 was more severe than usual and forced the chief of operations to evacuate women and children to the lower regions of the Terai foothills.



Tibetan refugees clearing ground in the Dhor Patan valley...

## THE ICRC IN NEPAL

*... and receive vitamin tablets at the ICRC infirmary.*





At Dhor Patan, Tibetan refugees prepare roof timbers...

## THE ICRC IN NEPAL

... and learn how to build sturdy houses.



Thanks to the ceaseless efforts of the team itself and of the ICRC delegation at Katmandu an air liaison was made possible, with "Pilatus-Porter" aircraft, although operation was irregular due to bad weather. However, this air service enabled the project to be completed in spite of a difficult beginning.

It soon became apparent to the team that the settlement of a yet larger group of refugees would require much more time and patience. Intensive exploitation of unclaimed land was therefore envisaged, necessitating two measures: to limit in a very strict manner the number of Tibetan settlers and, after six months of intensive work, to replace the specialized team by a smaller one composed of a nurse and two Swiss agriculturists.

Medical care had to be provided for Tibetans on their arrival as well as foodstuffs richer in protein and vitamins, in order to bring about a rapid improvement in their health<sup>1</sup>. They were inoculated against typhus, para-typhus and cholera, smallpox and diphtheria.

The first task undertaken was ground clearance.<sup>1</sup> A trial plot was cultivated in order to determine what cereals and vegetables could be grown at that altitude and in that climate. Very soon the first crops of potatoes and wheat were visible.

Stock rearing of such animals as yaks, goats and sheep proved difficult, due to the inadequate fodder and pasture. Plans for setting up a cheese-making plant had to be postponed.

At the same time, the housing problem had to be tackled, for the yak-hide tents were unsuitable for the often damp climate prevailing in the valley. Solid buildings of stones and clay covered with shingle-boards were constructed under the directives of the Swiss foreman.<sup>1</sup> Two Tibetan villages and a "Gömpa" (Buddhist temple) were thus established in the Dhor Patan valley.

After having organized this social welfare programme in Nepal—although somewhat outside its traditional field of activity—and after ensuring its operation for three years, the International Committee considered that this work could be carried on by organizations more specialized than itself in the field of practical

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<sup>1</sup> *Plate.*

## INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

mutual assistance. On May 31, 1963, therefore, responsibility for continuation of the whole operation was taken over by the Swiss Association for Technical Assistance.

Almost one year has since elapsed, and the International Committee of the Red Cross is pleased to learn that the Dhor Patan community is flourishing and prosperous. Cultivation extends now over almost fifty acres and thanks to a good potato crop and wheat harvest, food is available for a population of 250 for a period of seven months. In one or two years the present contribution of basic foodstuffs will no longer be necessary and little by little this community in the formerly uninhabited valley will be self-supporting. The success of the experiment will affect the whole valley and will be of benefit also to the Nepalese population.

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