

THE WORLD'S
CHILDREN

FAMILIES COME FIRST
LADAKH GOES LOCAL ● NO REFUGE?
STREET LIFE ● SHAKING THE MONEY TREE

THE COMMUNITY LEADS DEVELOPMENT IN LADAKH



(Photos: Tim Malyon)
Children can become malnourished very quickly in winter. The LNP team use this simple arm circumference check in the villages they visit.

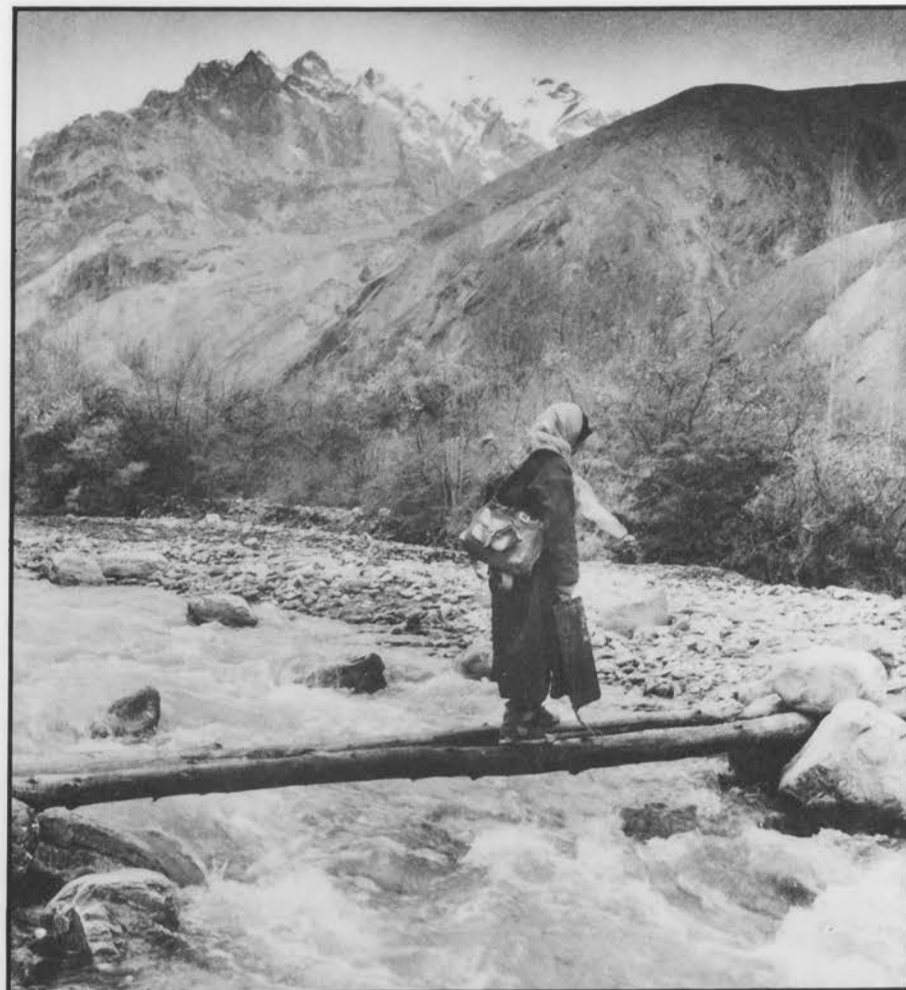
Ladakh is a remote Himalayan desert, protected by high passes, between Kashmir and Tibet. Politically part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, its culture is Tibetan in origin, strong, internally cohesive, yet facing grave problems, not least an infant mortality rate which reaches 170 per 1000 in some villages. Sir Robert ffolkes was invited there in 1978 to undertake emergency flood relief in the Indus Valley, and stayed as Save the Children's field director until 1984. He founded the Leh Nutrition Project (LNP), an integrated rural development project wholly funded by SCF, which now serves 82 villages and 15,000 people. It has grown fast, currently employing 45 staff, all Ladakhis, with a budget of over £200,000. This May, Sir Robert's successor as field director, Sandy Macaulay, left, to be replaced by a system of local management.

It was a poignant occasion, the last village meeting for the last expatriate field director in Ladakh. Sandy Macaulay had been invited to the village as guest of honour at the annual archery competition. On the morning after the festivities Sandy, the village family heads, Lobsang, the LNP fieldworker responsible for the village, and myself all gathered, cross-legged.

Chilling is a community of skilled brassmakers. A road will soon reach it, which villagers eagerly anticipate. Until then, however, the trail to Leh, Ladakh's old silk-route 'capital', remains a meagre boot's width of dust, with sickening drops to the swift-flowing Zaskar River below. Most villages in Ladakh are similarly inaccessible to any wheeled transport.

The road balances Chilling on a razor's edge of successful development or community collapse. "We would like a school, a brassmaking school, as part of the village school which we ask you to help us build," says Aba Ishe, brassmaker and respected village elder. This request is the culmination of long, on-going discussion, about the craft, new techniques, new markets, increased production, the tourists which the road will inevitably bring; above all about concern that the youth might be tempted away from the village by jobs in Leh or in the army, thus losing for ever the patient skill of generations.

Already LNP has paid Chilling brassmakers to train other villagers, one a hard-working teenager from a poor community which the advancing road has just reached. His family is sponsored through



No bridge — no schooling. Save the Children has provided the materials for several of these vital links.

Ladakhis have just taken over the management of their local SCF project — an appropriate step for a programme which has always placed a high priority on community involvement. Photo-journalist, Tim Malyon, saw this philosophy in action and joined SCF's field director at his final village meeting.

SCF. Sponsorship helped pay for his tools, and the income he is now generating helped pay for the construction of a new local-style building to house future tourists. The family is on its feet, through its own diligence and modest financial support.

Now LNP is investigating the Chilling school request — cost, how training can be integrated into the normal curriculum, who else can benefit from the facility. It is even researching the poten-

tial for small-scale water-generated electricity, enough to run power tools from a hot-spring stream which does not freeze in winter temperatures down to -40c. That idea also originated with the villagers.

This scenario demonstrates two basic beliefs which permeate all LNP's work, as Deen Khan explains. He has been a key figure in LNP since the beginning in 1978, and has just been appointed SCF zonal director for Jamimu and

Kashmir State. "LNP decides on projects at village level. When villagers put up a proposal, they discuss it with an LNP fieldworker, and decide how best to implement it. Everything originates with the villagers." Secondly, Deen continues, "If we are to see the children healthy and happy, we must uplift the economic conditions of the whole family. Without that, you can't really do anything for the children."

These sentiments are echoed by Rinchen Namgyal, the new LNP project coordinator, elected by his staff. "We must sit with the villagers, eat with them, drink with them. Only then will we understand their needs and know their problems. Only then will people get close to us, and really tell us what they want."

This deep-felt philosophy explains the remarkably imaginative breadth of LNP's work: from feeding centres, community medical programmes and immunisation, to supplying community yaks, promoting children's educational drama, introducing new vegetable crops, repairing remote paths, flood protection and emergency flood relief, building schools and bridges, and supporting the ancient Tibetan medical system in Ladakh.

It also explains why LNP takes such trouble to constantly visit its villages. LNP is the only SCF project to maintain horses for transport. And in winter, it sends out a month-long expedition to visit a group of five villages which can only be reached by walking up the frozen Zaskar River gorge, sleeping in caves en route. Snow closes the high passes from October to June, and only during February and March, when the river freezes, can the gorge to the villages be negotiated. We had to cross one 'low' (15000ft) pass between villages in almost 'white-out' conditions — heavy snow with the ominous 'crack' of avalanches audible in the distance.

The future is fascinating. As from May, LNP is managed locally, a logical conclusion to the local consultation philosophy. Save the Children's overseas director, Hugh Mackay, has pledged continued SCF funding for the project. He has total confidence in the new indigenous structure after visiting Ladakh this June with Sir Robert ffolkes. "They will walk across coals to do this properly", he asserted.

As the Chilling meeting drew to a close, villagers stood and presented white scarves to Sandy Macaulay in thanks for his work as field director. His task was precarious: to work himself out of the job, asking questions, posing problems, then disappearing until the answers were forthcoming — deeply involved, yet letting go. Since my 1984 visit, staff have increased immeasurably in self-confidence and ability to assess their own work, a reflection of theirs and Sandy's talents, and the evident trust established between them and departing field director.

We took our leave, climbing a rocky hill to the 'chortens', sacred monuments on the summit above the village. LNP's work is a beacon of hope in an often depressing development landscape. It offers the real prospect of ensuring that the community will sustain itself intact, evolving, staying ahead of change, profiting from altered circumstances rather than succumbing to them. Turning our backs for the last time, we shouted together the customary Tibetan refrain on reaching all high places — "Ki Ki So So Lha Gel Lo", "May the Gods be Victorious". They will, they will. ●



LNP has the first computer in Ladakh, powered by a petrol generator. GM Sheikh, head of the education and training section, is in charge of the new technology.



The brassmakers of Chilling village are very anxious that their age-old skills should be passed on to the new generation.