



2024 Update

Bhutan Foundation

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Assistive Technology for Children with Disabilities in Bhutan

In the scenic landscapes of Bhutan, where every corner is imbued with cultural richness, there lies a silent struggle faced by children with disabilities and their families. However, amidst this challenge, the Bhutan Foundation is working towards harnessing technology for their benefit.

The Bhutan Foundation, in partnership with various agencies, supported the establishment of the Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck Super Fab Lab and other smaller fab labs in colleges across Bhutan. These labs provide unique digital fabrication tools and services focused on laser, carpentry, electronics production, and industrial-grade work.

We are collaborating with the Super Fab Lab, College of Science and Technology's Fab Lab, and Phensem Parent support group to promote awareness and interest in assistive technology (AT). These labs are innovation hubs, where creativity can meet compassion to address the pressing needs of those often overlooked by society. We are paving the way for the first AT resource center dedicated to children with disabilities and their families. This center will serve as a beacon of hope, offering essential solutions and acting as a demonstration center for life-enhancing AT devices.



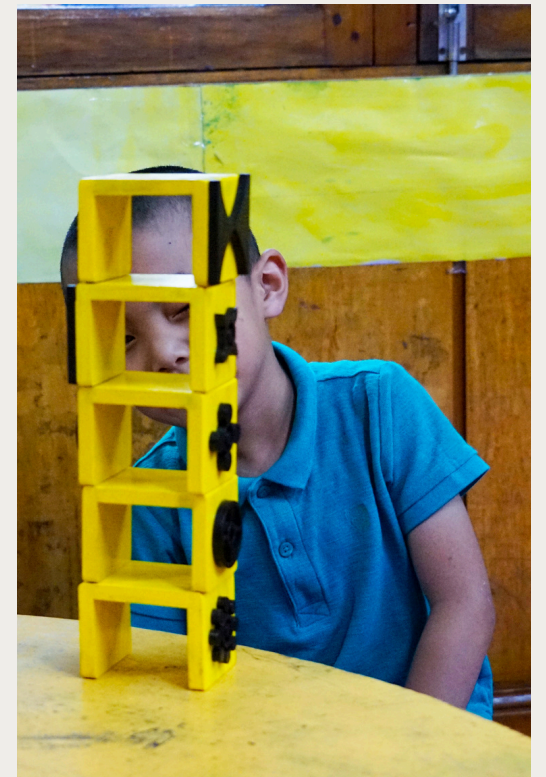
Scan here for more about this project.



We are creating a space for the resource center and training staff who will run the center. Training is being provided in Chennai, India, where the AT ecosystem is active and relevant to Bhutan.

Imagine a child with limited mobility empowered by a custom-made smart cane, or a visually impaired student seamlessly navigating their studies with a braille keyboard in Dzongkha, Bhutan's national language. These are the possibilities that lie ahead.

However, true progress can only be possible with collaboration and capacity building. That's why the Bhutan Foundation needs your support to send innovators from Bhutan to regional conferences, host workshops with external experts, and facilitate forums with persons with disabilities. Together, we can contribute greatly to ensuring assistive technology transforms the lives of children with disabilities.



Phenki Program Officer



Empowering Rural Bhutan: Sustainable Tourism

This Spring, we are excited to share our latest updates from the Small Grants Program– this unique program supports a diverse range of impactful initiatives with a shorter timeframe and a smaller budget for immediate and emerging needs across the country.

One of the goals of the Small Grants Program (SGP) is dedicated to expanding and diversifying alternative livelihood options by promoting sustainable tourism development in Bhutan. The Jigmechu Ecotourism Project exemplifies our commitment to integrating people, culture, socioeconomic factors, environmental considerations, and community development through sustainable tourism.

Nestled along the banks of the Wangchu River, Jigmechu has become a popular tourist destination, attracting both local and regional visitors. Renowned for its picturesque landscapes, the area offers various recreational activities like picnicking, camping, and birdwatching, providing opportunities to see the rare and endangered white-bellied heron that frequents the Wangchu River in search of fish. Jigmechu offers more than just natural beauty, it provides spiritual experiences, making a stay at Jigmechu Eco Camp a holistic and enriching experience.



Scan here for more about this program.



SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM

Jigmechu's success story is a testament to SGP's efforts in sustainable development. The project has not only attracted attention from other developmental partners but has also inspired our own farmers and community members to form community-based organizations, furthering the exploration and expansion of ecotourism as an alternative livelihood option.

Once a struggling community heavily reliant on oranges and other agricultural products, Jigmechu faced the risk of abandonment as businesses failed, and many young people chose to leave the area. However, during the pandemic, a group of eight individuals affected by the crisis saw an opportunity to make a positive impact. With initial support from the Small Grants Program, they introduced ecotourism to Jigmechu, providing the community with a chance to capitalize on its strategic location just a few hours drive from Thimphu and Phuntsholing. This initiative not only diversified their livelihoods but also helped preserve their culture and environment.

Villages and communities in Bhutan are grappling with rural-to-urban migration, and the reliance solely on agriculture for livelihoods can be limiting. The Small Grants Program seeks funds to assist these communities in exploring and diversifying their alternative livelihood options through the introduction of sustainable tourism and ecotourism initiatives.



Tshewang Dendup
Program Associate



Wangduechhoeling Palace Museum: A Cultural Journey

As the Wangduechhoeling Palace Museum and Culture Center enters its final phase, a team of conservation architects, engineers, exhibition designers, conservators and curators are meticulously piecing together a project that promises to redefine the traditional museum experience.

This ambitious initiative aims not only to preserve Bhutan's rich heritage but also to foster a new era of cultural engagement that resonates with both the locals and tourists. The gallery designs have been translated in the form of captivating exhibits enriched with narratives and integration of technology. The Palace will also create programming that will be key to its success including a virtual and in-person learning lab, a mindfulness institute, and a hub for research, collaboration and cultural exchange.

Museums globally exist as custodians of history, educational hubs, and catalysts for creativity. In Bhutan, however, the concept of a museum is still evolving. Traditionally viewed as tourist attractions, museums are now being reimagined as integral parts of the community, playing a crucial role in safeguarding the nation's cultural identity.



Scan here for more about this program.



PALACE RESTORATION

The vision for the Palace was conceived under the guidance of Her Majesty Galyum Tseyring Pem Wangchuck, with the goal of creating a space that not only showcases Bhutan's heritage but also engages and educates its people.

The Bhutan Foundation has been instrumental in bringing this vision to life, ensuring that the museum's design and exhibits are both inclusive and accessible to all visitors, especially the youth. The museum's galleries are a testament to Bhutan's artistic and literary legacy, with the manuscript gallery displaying ancient texts and printing blocks that offer a glimpse into the country's historical record-keeping practices. The oral history gallery, on the other hand, immerses visitors in the royal patronage's songs, poetry, and narratives, some of which were composed by members of the Royal Family.

A highlight of the museum is the recreation of the Wangduechhoeling *Mela*, an animated mural that transports visitors back to a weeklong festival introduced by the 2nd King, Druk Gyalpo Jigme Wangchuck. This exhibit not only celebrates Bhutan's festive traditions but also emphasizes the Palace's role as a cultural epicenter.

As the Palace prepares to open its doors, it stands as a beacon of Bhutan's commitment to preserving its heritage while embracing the future. This museum is not just a repository of artifacts; it is a vibrant, living institution that seeks to inspire, educate, and connect the people of Bhutan and visitors to the changing culture within Bhutan.



Norbu Dema
Country Director



Supporting Snow Leopard Country

Discover the remarkable success story of snow leopard conservation in Bhutan's Jomolhari region, where a harmonious blend of tradition, community support, and innovative conservation efforts has led to a thriving population of these elusive big cats. Explore how our multifaceted initiatives are fostering both wildlife preservation and community well-being in this remote Himalayan sanctuary.

Surveys involving remote cameras and genetic analyses have proven that the Jomolhari region of Soe, in Jigme Dorji National Park, is a stronghold for snow leopards in Bhutan.

These snow leopards thrive in an environment that also harbors hundreds of yak-herding families depending on the vast alpine pasturelands that also support blue sheep, the primary prey of snow leopards. Globally, snow leopards are threatened across their range, from poaching and retaliatory killing, prey loss and habitat destruction.

However, Bhutan's stability in its snow leopard population stems from the low level of threat to the predator, and local community members' tolerance of some level of livestock predation and support of conservation efforts are largely responsible for this. That is why bringing social and economic benefits of conservation efforts to the communities residing in the area is important to sustain their support.



Scan here for more about this program.

SNOW LEOPARD CONSERVATION



As a co-benefit of conservation and to garner community support, Bhutan Foundation has been supporting various livelihood programs. These include promoting ecotourism, enhancing local capacity in biodiversity conservation, supplying improved tents for yak herding communities, providing improved educational opportunities for children in the communities and supporting health camps to improve human and animal health.

The Bhutan Foundation also supported the initiation of the Jomolhari Mountain Festival, trained 46 highland community people on livestock product diversification, and distributed 78 modified tents to the communities of Lingzhi, Yaksa and Soe under Jigme Dorji National Park (JDNP). The Foundation will be supplying 91 tents to remaining households and to the Katsho gewog under Jigme Khesar Strict Nature Reserve in Haa.

The remote Jomolhari Ney is the most sacred monastery in the Soe area, and the only place for spiritual congregation for the community. The main monastery is dedicated to Tsheringma, the goddess of long-life, who is depicted riding a snow lion. The hermitages near the monastery house ascetics and renunciates who pray and meditate in these isolated locales. The locals support such individuals who they believe will pray for all sentient beings and thus bring peace, harmony, and good will to all in the area. The local government has approached us for support to renovate some of the structures for the hermits and the monastery.

This is an amazing opportunity to integrate insulation and other energy efficiency approaches while rendering our support to a small but important (otherwise neglected) community resource.



Lungten
Program Associate



What does Energy Security Mean for Highlanders of Lunana?

In Lunana, our highland communities lack access to reliable energy sources, relying instead on costly and environmentally damaging fossil fuels and biomass. Explore how off-grid solar PV systems can offer a sustainable solution, aligning with Bhutan's energy diversification goals and principles of Gross National Happiness.

Energy security for the highlanders of Lunana means access to reliable and sustainable energy sources that improve their quality of life while preserving their unique environment. With no access to electricity, these communities rely on fossil fuels and biomass for their energy needs, which can be expensive, environmentally harmful, and logistically challenging to obtain.

Introducing off-grid solar PV systems offers a cost-effective and environmentally friendly solution. It can provide these communities with a reliable source of electricity for lighting, heating, and cooking, reducing their reliance on fossil fuels and biomass. This transition not only improves their living conditions but also reduces environmental degradation and carbon emissions.

The shift towards renewable energy aligns with Bhutan's broader energy diversification goals outlined in the Renewables Readiness Assessment (RRA) by IRENA. By investing in renewable energy sources like solar, Bhutan can reduce its dependence on hydropower and traditional



Scan here for more about this program.



biomass, which will have positive impacts on the environment and the economy.

Moreover, improving energy access in Lunana can lead to broader socio-economic benefits. It can enhance healthcare services, education, and gender equality, while also creating opportunities for job creation and income generation. This holistic approach to development aligns with Bhutan's principles of Gross National Happiness and its commitment to carbon neutrality.

Overall, ensuring energy security for the highlanders of Lunana involves providing them with access to clean, reliable, and sustainable energy sources that improve their quality of life while preserving their unique environment and supporting their socio-economic development.

The Bhutan Foundation is seeking support and partnerships to help the communities of Lunana gain access to a reliable and renewable energy source.



Tshering Yangzom
Director of Partnerships and Philanthropy



Bhutan Pavilion at COP28, Dubai (UAE)

Witness Bhutan's pioneering debut at the UNFCCC COP28 in Dubai, where the Bhutan Pavilion became a beacon of collaboration and innovation in climate action. Discover how our carbon-negative nation is confronting the challenges of climate change with a unified front, bridging sectors from energy to finance. Learn about Bhutan's journey and its aspirations for the future, as it sets its sights on leveraging global partnerships for sustainable progress at COP33 and beyond.

For the first time, Bhutan hosted a pavilion at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP28) in Dubai, UAE in 2023. The Bhutan Pavilion offered unique opportunities for many agencies from Bhutan to connect with international and multilateral partners to secure further support in implementing Bhutan's climate strategy.

The pavilion allowed the energy, biodiversity, urban planning, tourism, technology, finance, and non-profit sectors to coordinate with each other on climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies in Bhutan. Funding and programming for the Bhutan Pavilion was supported by the Bhutan Foundation in partnership with the Karuna Foundation, Royal Government of Bhutan, Bhutan Ecological Society and other partners.

MOVING FORWARD



As a carbon-negative country, Bhutan hardly contributes to global greenhouse gas emissions, and bears the brunt of the negative impacts of climate change. In order for Bhutan to honor its carbon-neutrality pledge while mitigating inherent setbacks due to climate change, various challenges have to be overcome. These include access to climate finance, technology, and the know-how of tackling its challenges including emerging technologies.

Through the Bhutan Pavilion, it was evident to all parties that climate change COPs present enormous opportunities outside of the UN meetings and plenaries to connect with those that hold access to finance and technology in the public, private, multi-lateral and non-profit sectors. It also allowed Bhutanese agencies that have a stake in its climate strategies to coordinate and work together. Already, eyes are set on COP33, in 2028, which will take place closer to Bhutan, in neighboring India. This COP has taught many lessons that will help Bhutan fully capitalize on such an opportunity into the future.



Tshewang Wangchuk
Executive Director



Gelephu Mindfulness City

His Majesty the King of Bhutan has unveiled a groundbreaking vision for the Gelephu Mindfulness City, a Special Administrative Region designed to be a gateway between South Asia and Southeast Asia. Spanning 1000 km², this visionary project aims to create a hub for innovation, sustainability, and mindful living, nestled in the Bhutanese foothills and surrounded by rich biodiversity.

On December 17th, 2023, during Bhutan's National Day, His Majesty the King shared his vision for the Gelephu Mindfulness City, an aspiration to create a gateway linking South Asia with Southeast Asia.

This Special Administrative Region, spanning 1000 km², leverages Bhutan's global relevance, including the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness, environmental stewardship for a sustainable planet, and the timeless wisdom of Vajrayana Buddhism. The city aims to provide a hub for innovation, sustainability, and mindful living in an expanse of the Bhutanese foothills, tucked between two biodiversity hotspots – Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary and Royal Manas National Park – while maintaining a balance between economic prosperity and social and ecological wellbeing.

On Bhutanese New Year, as we heralded the Year of the Dragon, a Royal Charter for the governance of the city was received by His Royal Highness Gyalsey Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck (the crown Prince).

MOVING FORWARD

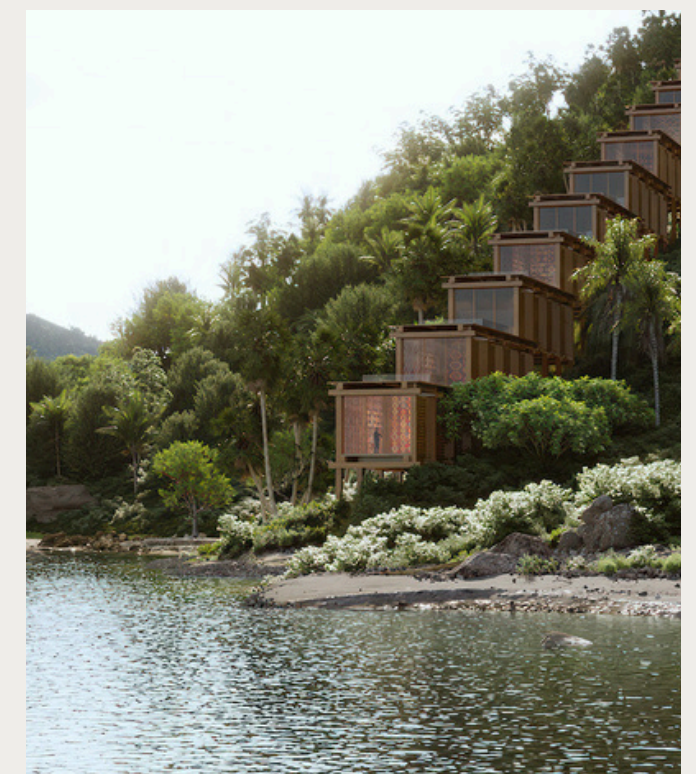


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Work is now already underway on the extension of the airport. Upgrading the Gelephu Airport into an international airport, establishing rail links with India, and improving road connectivity will bring enormous benefits to the area through increased access for people, goods, and services to and from the area.

Underneath the overall economic opportunities presented by the SAR, investments in healthcare, transformative education, and sustainable food production are fundamental building blocks upon which the city can thrive. These are areas worth exploring as they align with the mission and focus areas of the Foundation.

It is important that every Bhutanese thinks about how they can contribute to this collective national vision.



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Tshewang Wangchuk
Executive Director



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Some of the most meaningful gifts to the Bhutan Foundation come in the form of bequests. Estate gifts are good for donors because they allow for full flexibility and access to one's assets as long as needed. For the recipient organization, bequests may help build strategic reserves, enable growth, or fund special projects.

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