



2025 UPDATE



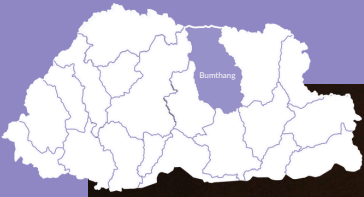


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Cover Image: Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*)

Left Image: Drumstick Primrose Flower (*Primula denticulata*)



Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen, along with Gyalsey Jigme Namgyel and Gyalsey Ugyen Wangchuck, engaging with the interactive display at the Intro Gallery.

Wangduechoeling Palace Museum and Cultural Center: Opening doors to history and culture

The 19th-century Wangduechoeling Palace, the birthplace of Bhutan's first king, has been recognized as a **historic treasure** by the World Monuments Fund and was recently featured as one of the **World's Greatest Places of 2025** by *TIME*

Nestled in the Bumthang valley, the Wangduechoeling Palace sits as the finest example of 19th-century Bhutanese architecture anywhere on earth. This distinction often goes unmentioned when describing the cultural significance, historical importance, and exciting future communicated by the 24 exhibits housed within the complex. Not all Kings have used the palace as their full-time home, yet the values and culture they have provided are felt walking through the doors.

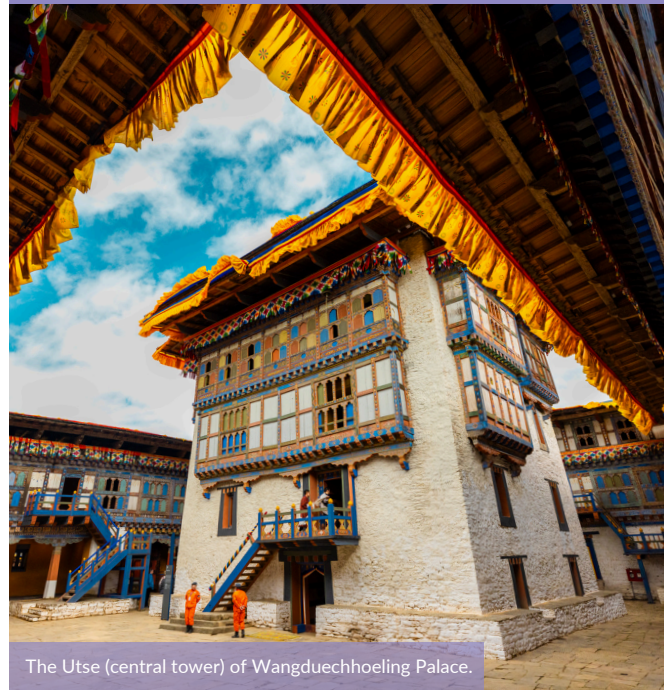
On October 30, 2024, The Palace Museum was consecrated in a special ceremony attended by Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen, Their Majesties the Gyalys, members of the Royal Family, and other esteemed government officials, presided over by the Dorji Lopen. This occasion marked the culmination of years of hard work by hundreds of artisans, craftsmen, museum professionals, philanthropists, and experts who dedicated time and treasure to recreate these spaces so they will continue to embody and tell the story of the country of the Thunder Dragon.



It has been said that things worth having are worth working for. Over a decade ago, under the visionary leadership of Her Majesty Queen Mother Tseyring Pem Wangchuck (Co-Chair of Bhutan Foundation), the Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development, transforming the palace into The Wangduechoeling Palace Museum and Culture Center was a courageous dream, a dream that felt like destiny. And so, the journey began with every contribution of talent and support moving us closer to our destination. Many feel that if not for the steadfast commitment of The Bhutan Foundation and the tireless efforts of the Hoch family, the journey may not have produced the same awe-inspiring result we see today.

This project, a labor of love spanning over a decade, stands as a testament to the history and culture of a nation, their principles, and philosophy. It was destiny that the tenets of Bhutanese culture and belief propelled us to journey's end. For those of us present at the ceremony, words cannot express the pride, joy, and gratitude felt being part of creating something that is lasting and will be treasured for another millennia. As we reflect on the journey, we remember countless challenges we faced, from coordinating restoration efforts to researching ways to integrate innovative technologies like sound and lighting and creating educational activities into the museum experience. There were many long hours spent planning and designing, curating, troubleshooting, and ensuring that every detail aligned with the vision.

Now, as the museum prepares to open its doors to the public in the spring of 2025, we're excited by its potential to offer an enriching experience to both local visitors and tourists. Many have reached out to us, expressing their eagerness and excitement to visit. The museum houses more than 24 galleries, each featuring interactive and layered storytelling designed to immerse visitors in Bhutan's rich history. The



The Utse (central tower) of Wangduechoeling Palace.

integration of modern technologies such as audiovisual elements and interactive exhibits is a pioneering step in enhancing the museum experience, making it one of the first in Bhutan to do so. The exhibits blend modernity and tradition, with an attempt to present Bhutan's heritage in an engaging, relevant, and accessible way for future generations. The local community has expressed great pride and enthusiasm for the creation of this cultural treasure in Bumthang. Many believe the museum will serve as a driver for cultural and economic vitality in the region.

The Bhutan Foundation transitioned the management of the museum to a newly formed board under the patronage of Her Majesty the Gyaltsuen. On February 23, 2025, The Bhutan Foundation formally welcomed Mr. Kuenga Lhendup as the founding Executive Director, ushering in a new era for the museum's continued development and leadership.

As the Wangduechoeling Palace Museum and Culture Center opens its doors, it stands as a symbol of Bhutan's commitment to preserving its rich cultural heritage while embracing modern advancements in museum design. To the many individuals who gave their support through The Bhutan Foundation and our ambassadors, thank you again. Your link to the heritage and culture of Bhutan is indelible. While it is already an iconic destination for locals and international visitors, as evidenced by Time Magazine designating the site as one of 25 that must be seen this year, the Palace's next journey to become a global center for culture and research has now begun. The Bhutan Foundation looks forward to sharing news of importance and accomplishment along the way.



Mrs. Daphne Cunningham, Mrs. Lucy Goelet, and Mrs. Norbu Dema present a Phuelcha (ceremonial gift) to Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen.

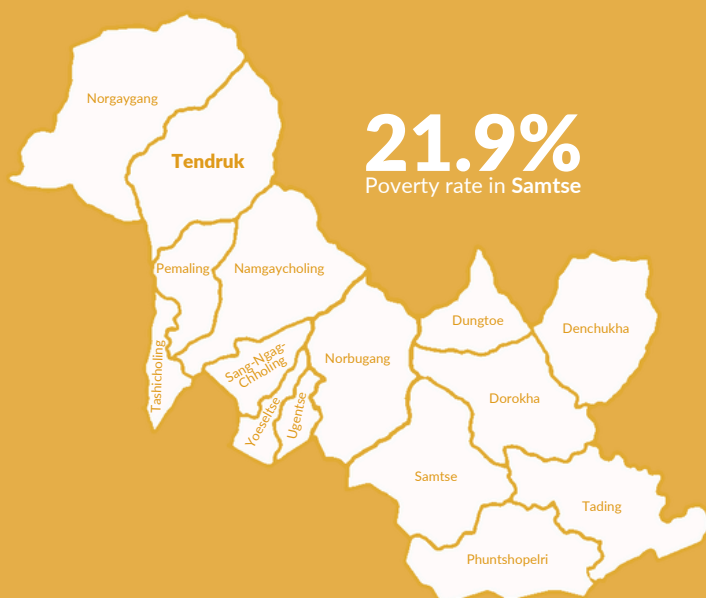


Norbu Dema
Country Director



A teacher engaging with students of diverse abilities at Tendruk Central School in an inclusive classroom

Breaking Barriers: Tendruk's Commitment for Children with Diverse Abilities



The Bhutan Foundation has been dedicated to improving inclusive education in Bhutan, supporting both infrastructure development and teacher training to ensure children with disabilities receive quality education. Through our initiatives, we have successfully introduced functional learning programs and built accessible classrooms at Mongar Middle Secondary School, creating a more inclusive learning environment. Over the years, we have trained more than **500 teachers** in inclusive education strategies, equipping them with the tools to support students with diverse needs.

Building on these successes, we are planning to extend our support to Tendruk Central School in Samtse, where **75 children- 47** of whom have severe disabilities- are in need of better learning spaces and specialized support. Tendruk Central School serves students from early childhood to grade twelve and caters to remote villages in the southern foothills of Bhutan. The district's high poverty rate makes it challenging for families to care for children with diverse abilities, sometimes forcing parents to make heartbreaking decisions, including abandoning their children.





Students gather for a school activity at Tendruk Central School.

Despite limited resources, the Tendruk community has taken remarkable steps to support these children. From small donation drives to constructing an inclusive kitchen, Volunteers, parents, teachers, and local residents have done what they can. Teachers not only educate but also advocate for awareness, encouraging families to bring children with diverse abilities to school. They even accompany children on long **72 kilometer** trips to the nearest hospital for physiotherapy, ensuring the children receive the care they need.

One such inspiring story is that of Sushmita, a young girl with cerebral palsy. She lives with her grandmother in a one-room apartment near the school. Thanks to the school's persistent encouragement and support from donors, Sushmita's grandmother was motivated to send her to school. During a recent visit, her grandmother shared how Sushmita has grown healthier and now eagerly anticipates each school day, a transformation that speaks volumes about the difference that community support can make in a child's life.

With such a committed community, we believe Tendruk is an ideal place to extend our support. By incorporating lessons from our work in Mongar, we aim to build accessible classrooms and provide professional development opportunities for teachers, equipping them with specialized knowledge to enhance their students' learning experience. With additional resources, we can

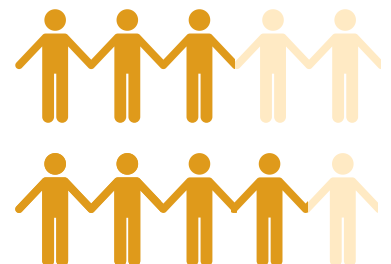
help create an inclusive space where children of all abilities can thrive.

The community and school have done everything they can, but they need more help. By donating to the Bhutan Foundation, you can be part of this effort to transform education and improve the lives of children with diverse abilities.



An endearing student in an inclusive classroom asks for her picture to be taken.

7/10 children with **diverse abilities** never get to go to school with their peers



Phenki
Program Officer



Camera trap image of a Snow Leopard in Jigme Dorji National Park

Supporting Mountain Communities in Snow Leopard Regions

Bhutan is one of twelve Asian countries where Snow Leopards live. Globally, their survival is threatened by poaching, retaliatory killing, habitat degradation, and declining prey populations. Bhutan Foundation is working hard to mitigate these threats and give over **134 Snow Leopards** in Bhutan's northern alpine mountain ecosystem a safe haven, which is a **39.5%** increase since 2016.

Snow Leopards in Bhutan share the landscape with semi-nomadic highland people that depend on these ecosystems for their livelihood. Snow Leopard habitats are threatened primarily by degradation, resource competition, and feral dogs. The conflict between snow leopards and local communities challenges their very existence because semi-nomadic people mainly depend on yak and collecting high-altitude medicinal plants for additional income; however, the loss of livestock to Snow Leopards and other predators threaten these livelihoods.

The Bhutan Foundation, in collaboration with the Royal Government, is working to strengthen the conservation of the alpine ecosystem and foster coexistence between Snow Leopards and mountain communities. Over five years, **232 yak herders** across the landscape have received modified tents that are strong, durable, and big enough for a family and its belongings. "With excellent shelter we can focus more on attending to our yak," said herder Tshering Penjor, who lives in Jigme Khesar Strict Nature Reserve.





Highland children inside the durable, eco-friendly tents provided to support semi-nomadic herders in the highlands.

The traditional tent requires four yaks to carry and needs 60 to 70 wood poles to set up. But new tents only require two yaks to carry it and no wooden poles. This not only reduces the yak herders' burden but also reduces resource pressure to alpine forests.

The Bhutan Foundation distributed 761 yak hair combs to the members of yak cooperatives to improve the quality of yak hair products. The new combs work better than scissors and sharp knives. Moreover, the Department of Livestock trained nine technicians from the national yak farm and the national highland development center to felt and process yak and sheep hair. This aligns with the 13th five-year plan goal of achieving high-value textile products from yak and sheep wool in Bhutan.

"The training program helped me learn to harvest quality hair and process it using felting equipment.

I can now teach herders proper hair harvesting techniques and yak hair felting when I visit herder camps," said Passang Gyem, a training participant from the National Highland Development Center.

The Bhutan Foundation, in collaboration with the Royal Government of Bhutan, also launched the PEaCE (Promoting Ecological and Community Engagement) for Snow leopard conservation in Bhutan project to focus on three key areas to identify and mitigate human and Snow Leopard conflict: it will strengthen Snow Leopard and prey monitoring using **AI-based camera traps**, reduce human-snow leopard conflicts with **predator-proof corral fencing**, and provide alternative livelihood initiatives like **eco-tourism and herbal processing** to diversify the income streams of highlanders. This initiative aligns with the National Snow Leopard Conservation Action Plan for Bhutan 2024-2023.



Lungten
Program Officer



A female farmer participant in the Farmer-to-Farmer Extension Program demonstrates the weeding process.

Farming Forward: Empowering Smallholder Farmers in Rural Bhutan

The agriculture sector plays a crucial role in Bhutan's economy. It employs **43.5%** of the workforce and made up almost **15%** of the 2023 GDP. However, traditional subsistence farming remains dominant, with commercialization limited by the mountainous terrain, small, fragmented landholdings, rural to urban migration, an aging population, and climate change.





Lead farmers from Samdrup Jongkhar being trained in climate-smart, sustainable, and organic farming practices.

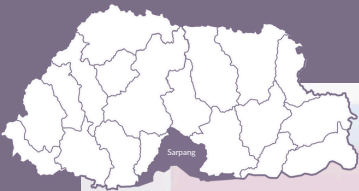
Aligning with Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan goal to “enhance smallholder farmers’ resilience and increase agricultural productivity,” the Bhutan Foundation, in partnership with the Tarayana Foundation and the Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative, aims to introduce innovative technologies to help with productivity and resilience. Farmers and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), combine their knowledge to build local capacity for adaptive farming technologies. We help integrate traditional and indigenous farming, and improve soft skills like communication, and marketing.

The program is implemented in seven districts: **Haa, Trongsa, Tsirang, Lhuntse, Mongar, Trashigang, and Samdrup Jongkhar.** These districts are highly vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity due to their remoteness and exposure to climate change risks.

Through this program, the Bhutan Foundation, and the Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative, trained ten lead farmers (four women and six men) from five gewogs in Samdrup Jongkhar, led by community progressive farmers, SJI officials, the District Agriculture Sector, and experts from the Agriculture Research and Development Centre, Samtenling. The week-long program covered climate-smart agriculture, sustainable farming practices, innovative technologies, organic and sustainable farming practices, equipping them to support their communities in tackling climate challenges. Additionally, their leadership abilities were enhanced to guide their communities in adapting to climate challenges. The lead farmers have further trained **150 community members** of five gewogs.



Lungten
Program Officer



Sherchok Women's Group members showcasing their products.

Empowering Women, Enabling Employment and Enriching Communities in Bhutan

Local communities in Bhutan are driving transformative change with innovative solutions to issues and problems; however, many grassroots initiatives struggle to access resources. The Bhutan Foundation's Small Grants Program (SGP) addresses this gap by empowering community-driven projects, launching eight initiatives for the 2024-2025 fiscal year with a total funding allocation of **\$118,549**.

Women across Bhutan are stepping up as leaders in agribusiness, representing more than **50%** of the workforce in this sector. They play a crucial role in fostering food security, sustainability, and economic empowerment. The initiative's impact is personal and transformative because many women who once struggled for independence and financial security now proudly contribute to their households and communities. Through our Small Grants Program they learned essential skills in food processing and business management and have elevated their social standing and become role models for others.

One such initiative supported by the SGP is the Sherchok Women's Group's agribusiness project in Gelephu. While their journey highlights the potential of community-driven efforts, it is only one example among many women-led initiatives transforming Bhutan's agricultural landscape. Across the country, women are learning essential skills in food processing, business





Products manufactured and marketed by the Sherchok Women's Group

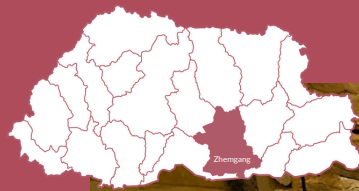
management, and digital marketing, helping them transition from traditional roles to leadership in agribusiness. Notably, these women have produced a variety of value-added products such as honey, spicy condiments, candy, powders, and soups, that have become popular in local markets. Sourcing their raw materials from eight Dzongkhags, their products are available at two outlets in the capital city of Thimphu.

The pandemic disrupted livelihoods nationwide, but agribusiness projects have renewed hope for many women. With the support of machinery like induction sealers, food dehydrators, labeling machines, and digital printers, women's groups have enhanced production capacity and elevated product standards. These advancements have boosted confidence, financial independence, and competitiveness in the marketplace.

To continue this life-changing work and expand the group's impact, we seek your support. Your generous contribution to the Small Grants Program will further empower these women entrepreneurs, foster sustainable agribusinesses, improve the quality of life for these women and their families, and create lasting change in Bhutanese communities.



Jamyang Choden
Program Officer



A member of the KNC removing stems from freshly harvested onions.

Paving the Way for Zhemgang's Youth: Stories from the field

The people of Bhutan's rural communities face growing challenges. With limited access to quality education, few avenues for sustainable livelihoods, and limited economic opportunities, it's hard for young people to see a future for themselves. However, a transformation is taking place in Zhemgang. **Grassroot initiatives** and **community-led cooperatives** are opening doors and equipping young people with the opportunities they need to build brighter futures.

Khenrig Namsum Cooperative (KNC) and Panbang Youth Cooperative (PYC), are charting a course toward sustainability through resilience, collaboration, and innovative practices.

In upper Zhemgang, KNC began in 2016 with just 16 members. It has blossomed into a vibrant cooperative supporting over **230 farmers** today. With support from the Small Grants Program in 2019, the cooperative established itself as a model for onion production in the region, increasing yields by over 80% compared to before the program started. They have expanded their distribution networks and reduced vegetable imports by 70%, supplying off-season produce and seeds to neighboring districts.

Beyond bolstering food security, KNC has created self-employment opportunities for farmers, allowing over **70 students and youth** to



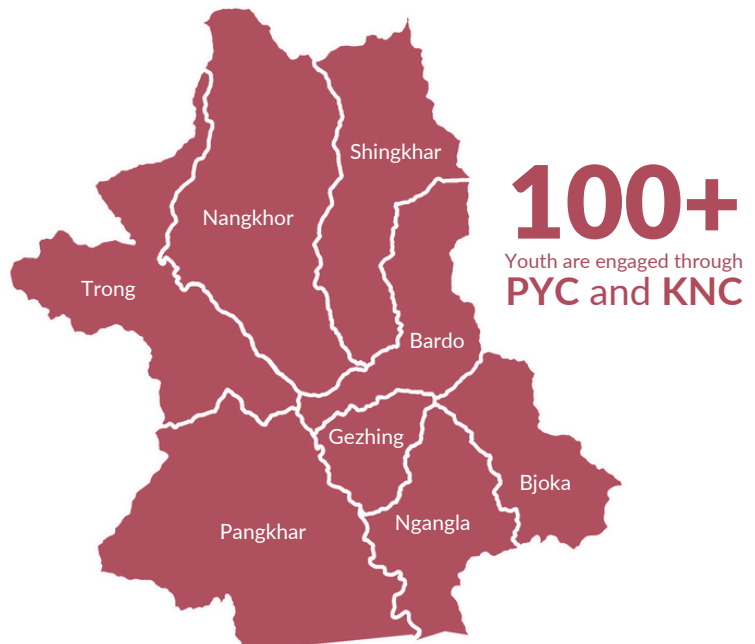
A young PYC member.

remain in their communities rather than migrate in search of work. However, recent challenges, including a devastating fire that destroyed essential equipment, pose significant threats to maintaining momentum.

Meanwhile, in Lower Zhemgang, PYC is transforming agricultural practices with an integrated farm approach to tap into emerging markets by growing Arabica coffee beans and raising the rare Golden Mahseer fish to farm.

PYC is working with young people, most of whom go to Sonamthang Central School, to give practical skills while ensuring fair wages through a model inspired by the hourly pay system of Australia. If young people are given salaries commensurate with Australian salaries, it's more likely they will stay in Bhutan. The cooperative also introduced profit-sharing systems and set aside reserves for health benefits, infrastructure, and future commissions. Through their innovative approach, PYC is making agriculture a viable and respected career choice.

Together, KNC and PYC embody a commitment to navigating the challenges of modern agriculture while contributing to Bhutan's sustainability. Their collaborative efforts not only enhance food security but also inspire youth to pursue agricultural careers with dignity. As these cooperatives continue to grow, they pave the way for a more resilient and sustainable future for Bhutan's agricultural landscape.



Dechen Wangmo
Communications Officer



Local communities harvesting Medicinal Herbs

Preserving Bhutan's Traditional Medicine: A Heritage of Healing

Bhutanese Traditional Medicine (BTM) is a profound healing system rooted in **gSo-ba Rig-pa**, an ancient medical tradition shaped by Tibetan, Indian, and Chinese influences.

Over centuries, traditional medicine in Bhutan has integrated local beliefs, blending spiritual and natural remedies. At its core is the philosophy of balance — maintaining harmony among the three vital energies: **rLung (Air)**, **mKhris-pa (Bile)**, and **Bad-kan (Phlegm)**, connected to the five elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Space.

Institutionalized under His Majesty the Third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, it became part of Bhutan's healthcare system in 1971 and was later enshrined in the Constitution in 2008. Today, the Faculty of Traditional Medicine (FoTM), under the Medical





Herbal medicines at the Traditional Medicine Hospital dispensary

University, trains practitioners, produces medicines, and promotes research, ensuring BTM remains accessible across all districts.

Despite its rich history, BTM faces challenges: underfunding, infrastructure limitations, and lack of global recognition. Additionally, overharvesting of certain medicinal plants and climate change threaten Bhutan's biodiversity — the very source of its remedies.

However, opportunities for growth remain vast. Bhutan's pristine environment offers a diverse range of medicinal resources, positioning the country as a potential global leader in sustainable and alternative medicine. By integrating traditional knowledge with modern healthcare, strengthening research,

and fostering international partnerships, Bhutan aims to establish itself as a hotspot for traditional medicine, leveraging on existing training and clinical services.

With continued support and innovation, BTM can preserve its cultural heritage while evolving to meet the healthcare needs of future generations — promoting not just physical healing, but spiritual and mental well-being, too. In addition, Bhutan's traditional medicine sector presents exciting economic opportunities that can benefit from a strong foundation. The Bhutan Foundation is in active dialogue with FoTM and the Ministry of Health to lay out a long-term strategic plan that will further strengthen the foundations of BTM.



Kunzang Dorji
Communications and IT Officer



North view of the Tashichhoe Dzong.

Shaping Bhutan's Urban Future: Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Planning

The Bhutan Foundation is collaborating with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport (MOIT) to train Bhutanese urban planners, architects, and engineers to tackle rapid urbanization challenges in Thimphu and Paro. A recent training program took a team of Bhutanese planners to Berkeley, MIT, Harvard, and New York, where they studied cutting-edge urban planning strategies, including community-driven design, transit-oriented development, and form-based codes. These approaches offer solutions to issues such as congestion, infrastructure strain, and the growing impacts of climate change.





Officials from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport attending the 'Implementation of Design Code' training in Boston, MA.

Sangay Wangdi, Senior Urban Planner with the Ministry said that the most significant takeaway from the training was realizing the importance of community-driven, sustainable, and inclusive urban planning in addressing Bhutan's urbanization challenges. "Our visit to the Perkins School for the Blind and William E. Carter School further revealed the need to incorporate universal design principles that take into consideration special needs of the users in Bhutan's future urban projects," he said.

The team also explored how economic hubs like Cambridge benefit from partnerships between universities and local industries, a model that could be adapted to Bhutan to drive innovation and job creation. With these insights, Bhutanese planners are now better equipped to implement

sustainable, people-centered urban policies.

Lessons from zoning reforms and mixed-use developments in San Francisco and Boston provide adaptable frameworks to ensure Bhutan's cities remain livable and efficient. These strategies will not only inform urban planning in Thimphu and Paro but also serve as models for replication in other urban centers, including major upcoming projects across Bhutan.

Moving forward, continued collaboration with MOIT and international experts will help shape Bhutan's urban policies, ensuring that development is balanced with cultural preservation, climate resilience, and long-term sustainability.



Sangay Chedar
Program Manager



Her Majesty Gyalum Tseyring Pem Wangchuck with the Bhutan Foundation Team

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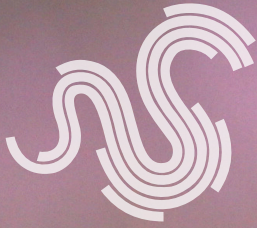
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Faculty of Traditional Medicine
Traditional Medicine Hospital
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UNICEF Bhutan

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Wangduechhoeling Palace Museum and Cultural Center
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