



Bhutan Foundation
1986 - 2026

2026 UPDATE





Students from Lingzhi School collecting firewood

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Cover photo: A bird's eye view of Lingzhi community where Lingzhi School is located. At 4,200 meters (13,700+ ft), the school is one of the most remote learning centers in Bhutan, accessible only after a two- to three-day trek across rugged mountain terrain.





Celebrating 40 Years of Partnerships

For 40 years, the Bhutan Foundation has walked together with the people of Bhutan, nurturing a shared vision grounded in Gross National Happiness. Since 1986, the Foundation has helped turn ideas into action, empowering communities, strengthening local institutions, and safeguarding the country's extraordinary natural and cultural heritage.

This milestone is not only a celebration of what has been achieved, but also of the partnerships that made this possible. This includes farmers, students, artisans, leaders, and supporters who believed in a more inclusive and sustainable future. Together, we have built pathways for opportunity, resilience, and lasting impact across the country.

As we mark four decades of this journey, we look ahead with renewed purpose. With your continued support, we remain committed to advancing Bhutan's priorities, ensuring that communities thrive, traditions endure, and future generations inherit a nation as vibrant and resilient as the one we celebrate today.





Revitalizing Bhutan’s Living Heritage of Healing

For generations, Bhutan’s traditional medicine has been a source of healing, comfort, and trust. Today, it continues to serve thousands, from elderly patients seeking relief from chronic pain to families relying on herbal remedies for everyday care. According to the 2023 National Health Survey, 22.9% of Bhutanese seeking healthcare turn to traditional medicine.

In remote communities, where access to modern healthcare can take days of travel, this system is often the only lifeline. Patients journey long distances, not just out of necessity, but because they believe in its healing power. At its heart, traditional medicine is more than healthcare; it is a living legacy of Bhutan’s culture, knowledge, and identity.

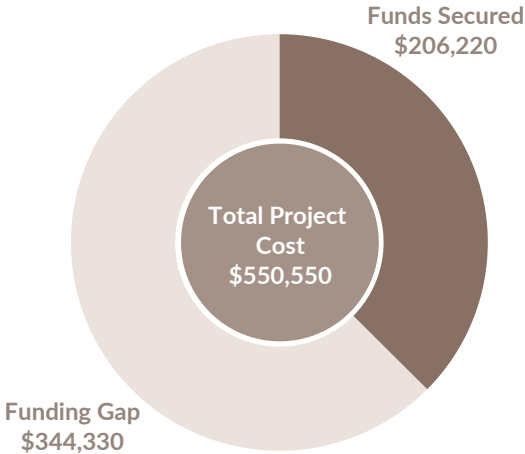
Yet this legacy is at risk of fading. Much of this knowledge remains undocumented, vulnerable to being lost with each passing generation. Medicinal plants, the very foundation of these treatments, are increasingly threatened by climate change and unsustainable harvesting.

At the same time, limited research and investment restrict the ability to validate and strengthen these practices for the future. As one practitioner shared, “People trust these remedies because they work, but we must ensure the knowledge, the plants, and the skills are preserved.” Without urgent action, Bhutan risks losing not only a trusted system of care but a vital part of its heritage.

The Heritage of Healing initiative is a three-year, nationwide effort to safeguard and strengthen this system. In partnership with the National Center for Traditional Medicine Services, the program will expand access through health camps, invest in research and professional training, conserve medicinal plants, and digitally preserve centuries of knowledge. It will also promote evidence-based validation and build global partnerships to elevate Bhutan’s traditional medicine on the world stage.

This initiative will bring healing closer to patients in rural and underserved communities. It will empower practitioners and researchers with the tools to sustain and advance their work. It will support communities who depend on natural resources, ensuring they are protected for the future. Most importantly, it will ensure that future generations inherit not a fading tradition, but a thriving system of healing, one that continues to care for people, communities, and culture for years to come.

Financials



How You Can Make a Difference



\$15,000

Expand traditional medicine to hard-to-reach populations



\$28,000

Domesticate and cultivate rare medicinal plants



\$30,000

Translate four root tantras of Sowa Rigpa into Dzongkha



\$45,000

Develop and implement traditional medicine intervention packages for palliative care and elderly populations



\$50,000

Nationwide survey and geospatial mapping of traditional medicine resources





An elderly monk receiving care during the Traditional Medicine Health Camp in Punakha

“

People trust these remedies because they work for them. But we must ensure the knowledge, plants, and skills are preserved for the next generation.”

—Practitioner
National Traditional Medicine Hospital



A few varieties of Traditional Medicine used by traditional practitioners



Sangay Chedar
Program Manager



Creating Opportunities Through Digital Skills for Children with Special Needs

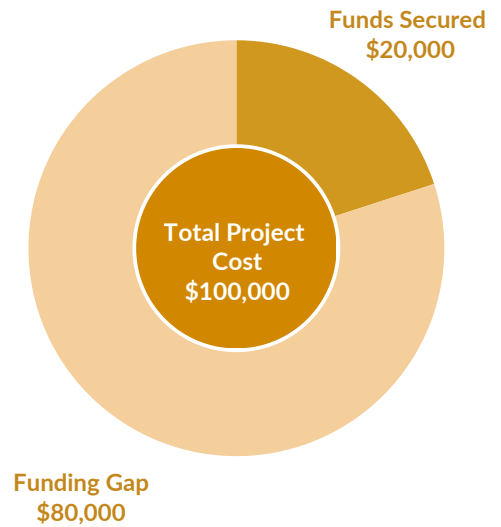
In today's digital world, access to technology and creative skills can unlock opportunities that traditional education often cannot, especially for children with special needs. While many struggle to thrive in conventional academic settings, digital and multimedia skills offer alternative pathways that build confidence, foster creativity, and create access to meaningful livelihoods. The Bhutan Foundation's multimedia training program is helping bridge this gap by equipping students with practical, marketable skills such as graphic design and photo and video editing, opening doors to Bhutan's growing creative and digital sectors.

For many children with special needs, the journey through school is uncertain, and opportunities beyond it are limited. Traditional systems do not always accommodate diverse learning needs, leaving many children disengaged and without clear pathways for the future. One mother shared how her son struggled in school and faced an uncertain future. Through the program, he discovered a passion for multimedia – creating videos, expressing ideas, and building confidence. Today, he dreams of becoming a film director, showing what becomes possible when children are given the right tools and support.

The Foundation has piloted a multimedia training program with two cohorts and established a dedicated lab at Changangkha Middle Secondary School to support hands-on, guided learning. The program is now being integrated as an optional course, with plans to expand to schools in Tendruk, Tang, and Mongar, bringing inclusive, skills-based learning to more children across Bhutan.

Children with special needs will gain practical skills, confidence, and new pathways to opportunity. Teachers will be better equipped to support inclusive learning, while families will see new possibilities emerge for their children's futures.

Financials



How You Can Make a Difference



\$5,000

Training of teachers at one school
(3 schools planned)



\$10,000

Construction of one computer lab
(3 needed)



\$10,000

Furnishing of computer lab with
equipment and learning materials
(3 needed)





Hands-on multimedia training in design, video editing, and digital skills



Photo-editing training in session



Norbu Dema
Country Director



Opening Doors to Independence for Children with Disabilities at Tendruk Central School

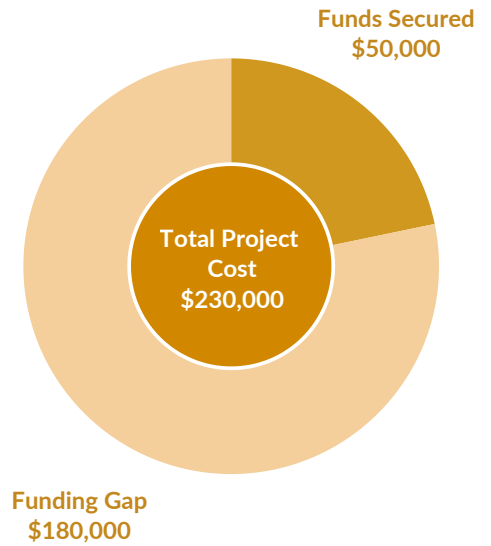
Bhutan has made significant progress in inclusive education, with 50 schools now providing growing opportunities for children with diverse abilities. The ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has further strengthened the country's commitment to inclusion, not just in policy, but in practice. Yet, the journey toward a truly inclusive society is far from complete. Stories shared by individuals with disabilities, ranging from being carried to school on horseback to overcoming physical challenges, highlight one powerful truth: education is the foundation of independence, dignity, and opportunity.

At Tendruk Central School in Samtse, this reality is especially urgent. The school supports 77 children with diverse abilities, including 50 with severe disabilities, while managing an increasing number of referrals each year. Limited infrastructure, resource shortages, and distance from essential health services place immense strain on both students and teachers. Families often relocate and live in one-room apartments to keep their children in school, relying on small donations for basic needs. But this fragile support can quickly collapse. Susmita, a child with cerebral palsy, was able to attend school with the help of her grandmother, until an injury forced her caregiver to leave. Without that support, her education came to a halt, reflecting the reality many children face.

For over a decade, the Bhutan Foundation has been working to strengthen inclusive education so that every child has access to quality learning opportunities. At Tendruk Central School, we are supporting efforts to improve infrastructure, strengthen support systems, and expand access to essential services, ensuring that children can continue their education without disruption.

With your support, 77 children, their families, and teachers will benefit from a more inclusive and enabling environment. Together, we can ensure that no child is turned away from the one opportunity that can shape their future: education.

Financials



How You Can Make a Difference



\$150

Access to health and rehabilitation services for one child



\$250

Specialized learning materials and assistive devices for one child



\$300

Capacity building for one teacher for increasing enrollment



\$1,500

Inclusive classroom and learning space for one child





An instructor attends to a child in an inclusive classroom at Tendruk Central School



Tendruk School supports 77 children with diverse abilities





Sustaining Livelihoods in the Highlands of Dagala

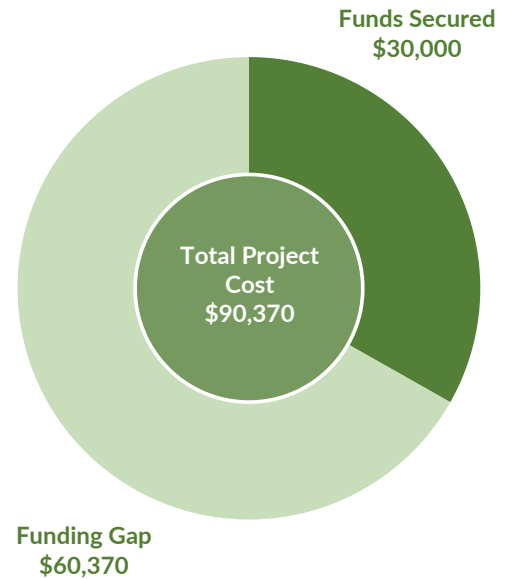
High in Bhutan's Dagala Mountain Range, 37 yak-herding households have sustained a way of life deeply rooted in the land for generations. Spanning elevations from 2,500 to 4,720 meters (8,200 to 15,500 ft), this alpine landscape is not only their home, but also a critical water source for rivers flowing into Thimphu, Chhukha, and Wangduephodrang, supported by more than 30 high-altitude lakes. Yak herding is central to both livelihoods and the stewardship of this fragile ecosystem, with families relying on yaks, medicinal herbs, and tourism while migrating seasonally to adapt to harsh climatic conditions.

Yet this way of life is under increasing strain. Yak herding is becoming less economically viable due to limited market access, low productivity, and poor product quality. As noted by livestock officials, the number of herding households is steadily declining, while Bhutan's yak population has dropped by 28%, from 40,897 in 2020 to 29,432 in 2024, raising concerns that this tradition could disappear within a decade. For herders like Ms. Buthri, new opportunities are emerging, but challenges remain. Although high-value cheese production has proven economically viable, she continues to process cheese in temporary camps using firewood and LPG, limiting production and exposing products to hygiene risks.

In response, the Bhutan Foundation, in partnership with the Royal Government of Bhutan, introduced high-end cheeses, Serja (Tomme) and Serjom (Gumdel), providing training, equipment, and market linkages. By 2025, communities were producing 720 kg of cheese per month, earning approximately \$7,400, or about \$200 per household. Building on this success, the Foundation now plans to establish an integrated solar-powered cheese processing unit to ensure hygienic production, improve quality, and expand market access.

This initiative will directly benefit the 37 yak-herding households in Dagala, strengthen the resilience of highland communities dependent on yak-based livelihoods, and help protect the critical water sources that sustain thousands of people downstream, ensuring that both livelihoods and landscapes endure for generations.

Financials



How You Can Make a Difference



\$450

Power a shared solar processing facility for one herder



\$500

Train one herder in advanced cheese production and facility maintenance



\$1,500

Support one herder for a shared cheese processing facility





Ms. Buthri and her family of yak herders

“

In just four years, Bhutan has lost 28% of its yak population. At this pace, yak herding, a lifeline for our highland communities, could disappear within a decade.”

— Mr. Penjore
Assistant District Livestock Production Officer

“

Without proper facilities, herders are forced to produce in unsafe conditions, limiting quality and income. A dedicated processing unit is urgently needed to unlock their full potential.”

— Mr. Loday
Livestock Production Officer

“

High-value cheese has opened a new market for us. For the first time, yak milk is creating real income opportunities beyond traditional products.”

— Ap Tsagay
Yak Herder, Dagala



A worker at the cheese processing facility



Lungten
Program Officer



Empowering Communities to Drive Lasting Change Across Bhutan

For over a decade, the Bhutan Foundation's Small Grants Program (SGP) has empowered communities to turn local ideas into lasting solutions. With grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000, the program has supported more than 90 projects across 60+ communities, investing over \$530,000 in initiatives that strengthen livelihoods, preserve culture, and build resilience. By placing resources directly in the hands of communities, SGP enables locally driven solutions that align with Bhutan's broader development goals. Last year, thanks to your support, we funded nine new community-led projects totaling about \$120,000. This year, we aim to expand our reach even further, supporting an even larger cohort of change makers.

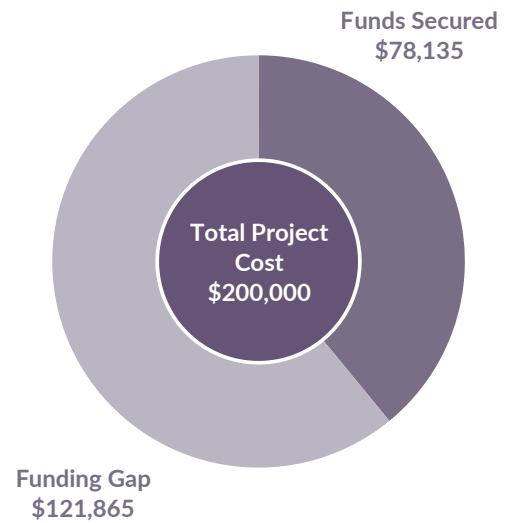
Across Bhutan, communities face deeply rooted challenges that often go unseen. In Pasakha, more than 22,000 factory workers endure extreme heat while unknowingly exposing themselves to harmful dust. For years, many removed protective gear just to cope. "The awareness sessions are saving lives," shares Mr. Tshotu, a Health and Safety Officer, reflecting a shift in behavior after intervention.

In Bumthang, a group of 15 women beekeepers struggled with labor-intensive methods that limited productivity while balancing household responsibilities. Meanwhile, in eastern Bhutan, youth entrepreneurs like Mr. Jigme Phuntsho lacked access to packaging and certification, preventing their products from reaching larger markets.

Through targeted small grants, the Foundation is helping communities overcome these barriers. Health initiatives are improving workplace safety and awareness, agricultural projects are introducing modern, efficient practices for women farmers, and youth cooperatives are gaining access to the tools required to enter national markets.

These solutions are already delivering results, from increased safety compliance to improved livelihoods and new economic opportunities. As the Foundation expands the program, it aims to support even more changemakers, proving that when communities are trusted with resources, they create impact that endures.

Financials



How You Can Make a Difference



\$2,000

Awareness program in one district



\$6,000

Knowledge exchange forum for farmers cooperative



\$7,250

Packaging and certification for one cooperative



\$15,000

Supports one community project





"The newer technologies like flow hives, PET feeding systems and protective equipment will make the work much easier for our women beekeepers and set a new standard for how we manage our hives in the future."

— Mr. Passang Wangdi
Project Technical Manager

“

The awareness sessions are saving lives. Workers now understand why protective equipment matters, even in extreme heat, and are choosing to protect themselves every day."

— Mr. Tshotu
Health and Safety Officer

“

This intervention is transforming how factories approach worker safety. By raising awareness of overlooked health risks, it is strengthening our ability to enforce safety standards and protect thousands of workers."

— Tshering Lhamo
Department of Industry



"This support for packaging and certification is the key that will unlock national markets for our local products. For the first time, our youth-led enterprises will have the packaging and certification to compete with the best."

— Mr. Jigme Phuntsho
Member of Samjong Cooperative



Jamyang Choden
Program Officer



Building a Climate-Smart School for Children in Lingzhi

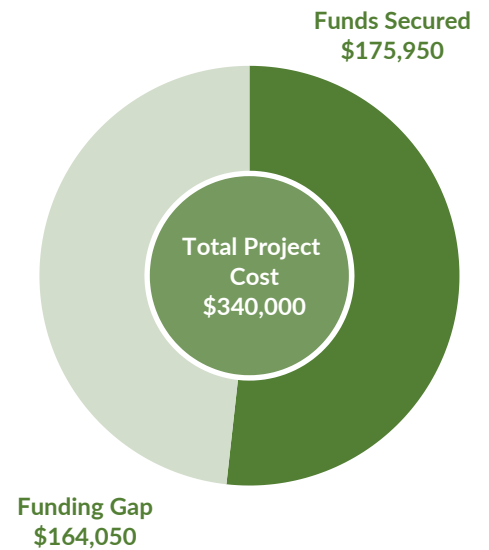
At 4,200 meters (13,700+ ft) in Bhutan’s Himalayas, Lingzhi School is one of the country’s most remote learning centers, reached only after a two- to three-day trek across rugged mountain terrain beneath Mount Jomolhari. For the 57 children studying here, education is more than just a place of learning. It is their only bridge to opportunity and connection to a rapidly changing world. In a fragile high-altitude ecosystem increasingly affected by climate change, ensuring a safe and resilient learning environment is essential, not only for these children but as a model for sustaining education in Bhutan’s most remote communities.

Yet, every day, students face conditions that make learning extraordinarily difficult. Classrooms are in aging prefabricated structures where cold winds seep through the walls, while dormitories are overcrowded and lack insulation. Basic sanitation is almost non-existent, with toilets located 200 meters (656 ft) downhill and no running water. Some of the youngest boys shared that they often wet their beds at night, too afraid to walk through the cold and darkness. For older girls, the absence of water makes managing hygiene, especially during menstruation, a daily struggle, causing discomfort and embarrassment. Despite these hardships, the children continue to show remarkable determination, arriving in class each morning with dreams of becoming doctors, engineers, and teachers.

Recognizing this urgent need, the Bhutan Foundation is working with stakeholders to transform Lingzhi School into a climate-smart, energy-efficient campus designed for extreme environments. By improving classrooms, dormitories, and sanitation facilities, and introducing sustainable systems such as solar heating, the project will create a safer, healthier, and more dignified learning environment.

All 57 students, along with teachers and staff, will directly benefit, while the initiative also serves as a model for climate-resilient education across Bhutan’s high-mountain communities, ensuring that no child’s future is limited by where they are born.

Financials



How You Can Make a Difference



\$180

Learning resources and digital materials for one student (57 students)



\$15,000

Construct a new classroom for students (7 classrooms needed)



\$30,000

Safe, clean school toilets keep children, especially girls, in school



\$100,000

Dormitory for students ensuring they have a safe, secure place to live and thrive





Lingzhi village at an altitude of 13,700+ ft



Boys' toilet at Lingzhi School





Protecting Bhutan's Highland Landscapes: A Community-Centered Approach

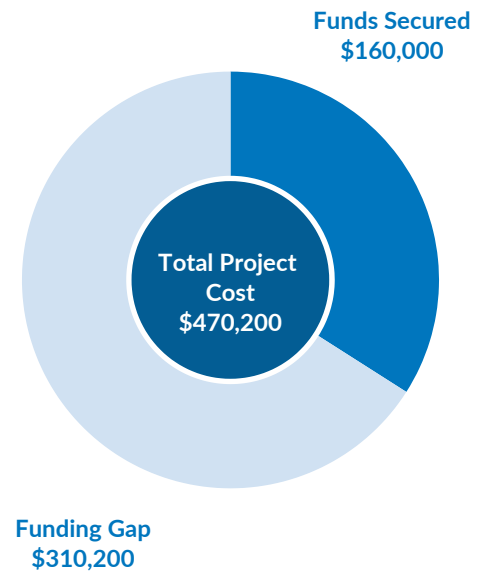
Bhutan's highland landscapes, stretching across Haa, Jigme Khesar Strict Nature Reserve, Jigme Dorji National Park, northern Paro, and Wangchuck Centennial National Park, are among the country's most vital ecosystems. These fragile alpine environments form the core habitat of the endangered snow leopard and support iconic wildlife such as the Bengal tiger, takin, musk deer, and Pallas's cat. At the same time, they safeguard the headwaters of rivers that power Bhutan's hydropower sector, a critical source of national revenue. At the heart of this landscape are 358 yak-herding families whose lives and traditions are deeply intertwined with these mountains, making their well-being essential to the future of conservation.

However, life in these remote highlands is increasingly difficult. Communities face climate-related risks that threaten infrastructure such as schools, while limited access to skills, markets, and livelihood opportunities restricts their resilience. Human-wildlife conflict continues to put both livelihoods and safety at risk, and there is a growing need for stronger conservation efforts, including wildlife monitoring and habitat protection. Without meaningful support, both communities and ecosystems remain vulnerable.

In response, this integrated initiative brings together community well-being and conservation. It will make schools like Jomolhari safer and more climate-resilient, improve nutrition through high-altitude agriculture, and equip communities with practical skills such as carpentry and electrification. Sustainable livelihoods will be strengthened through medicinal plant processing and ecotourism, while cultural identity is reinforced through events like the Jomolhari Mountain Festival. Alongside this, efforts will reduce human-wildlife conflict, map hotspots, and enhance wildlife monitoring and environmental awareness in partnership with the Department of Forests and Park Services.

With an estimated budget of \$470,200, this initiative will directly benefit 358 yak-herding families, students in remote schools, and surrounding communities while ensuring that Bhutan's extraordinary highland ecosystems continue to thrive.

Financials



How You Can Make a Difference



\$12,000

Medicinal plant processing equipment



\$28,000

Community education and awareness



\$60,000

Human-wildlife conflict mitigation for one village



\$150,000

Ecotourism development





A community consultation in Soe, Jomolhari



Distribution of solar corral fencing to highlanders





Advancing Science and Research for Bhutan's Sustainable Future

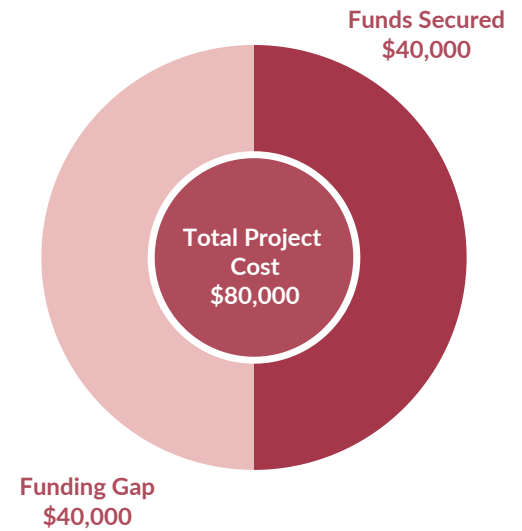
Education has long been at the heart of the Bhutan Foundation's mission to strengthen human capacity and expand opportunity. One of our most meaningful initiatives is the Bruce Bunting Scholarship, established in 2020 to support two Bhutanese students each year to pursue Master's degrees at the College of Natural Resources, Royal University of Bhutan. Named in honor of Dr. Bruce Bunting, the first President of the Bhutan Foundation and a lifelong environmentalist, the scholarship reflects his belief in the power of education to transform lives and communities.

Despite strong commitment and talent, many aspiring individuals face financial and personal barriers to advancing their education, limiting not only their own potential, but Bhutan's ability to build the skilled workforce it needs. Janga Bdr Gaylal's journey reflects this reality. At times uncertain about his future, he persevered, motivated by his family's sacrifices and the promise of education. Receiving the Bruce Bunting Scholarship in 2020 to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science became a turning point. Today, Janga Bdr is a Researcher at the National Livestock Research Centre and has already published seven research papers, with three more under review, contributing knowledge that directly benefits Bhutan's agricultural sector and rural communities.

The Bruce Bunting scholarship provides financial assistance and supports research in Conservation Biology and Natural Resource Management. Graduates go on to serve in key sectors, generating knowledge and solutions that address real-world challenges. The impact is already clear. Six scholarship graduates are contributing across sectors, from strengthening natural resource management to improving livelihoods in rural communities.

Each year, promising candidates are forced to put their ambitions on hold due to lack of funding. With your support, we can ensure that more individuals like Janga Bdr have the opportunity to learn, grow, and give back to their country. Your investment in the Bruce Bunting Scholarship is an investment in Bhutan's future — its people, its knowledge, and its resilience. With continued support, this initiative will strengthen human capacity, improve livelihoods, and build a more resilient and sustainable future.

Financials



How You Can Make a Difference



\$2,000

Living expenses for one student



\$2,000

Supports research work for one student



\$4,000

Supports tuition for one student





Mr. Janga Bdr Gaylal, 2020 Bruce Bunting Scholarship recipient, collecting research data



Mr. Ugyen Tenzin, 2025 Bruce Bunting Scholarship recipient, in the field



Lungten
Program Officer



From Passive Recipient to Active Citizen

In Bhutan's young democracy, ensuring that citizens can actively participate in decisions that shape their lives is essential. Yet, in many rural districts, development has long been viewed as something determined by government officials, with communities playing a limited role. Programs like Project Mikhung (Citizenship), implemented by the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, are changing this narrative.

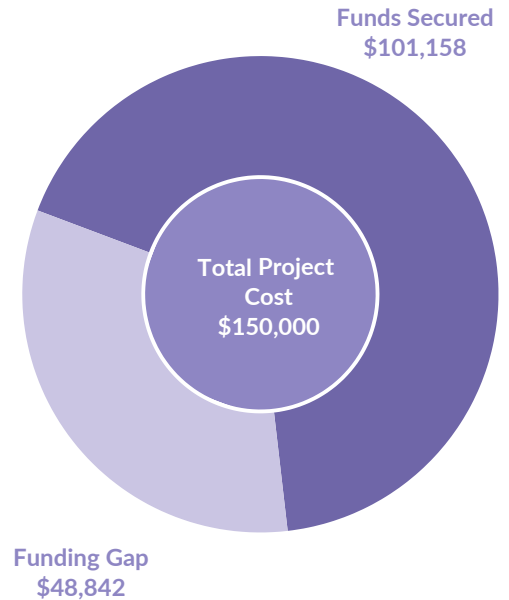
Through workshops in schools and community halls, youth and local leaders gain practical skills in civic engagement, media literacy, and Gross National Happiness-based participatory planning. The impact is clear. Over 90% of participants report increased confidence in speaking up, and more than 80% now better understand how to influence decisions in their communities.

Deep-rooted perceptions of reliance on the state for *Kidu* (welfare) continue to limit community initiative. In many rural areas, people are still learning how to engage in planning processes, often feeling that their voices do not carry weight. Geographic isolation further distances communities from decision-making platforms, making sustained engagement difficult. Without continued support, these early shifts toward participation risk fading.

By expanding these programs to more districts, the Bhutan Foundation is strengthening a culture of active citizenship. Already, change is visible. In Tsirang, citizens who once remained silent now question budgets and propose solutions such as village-level consultations and stronger public information sharing. In Paro, students organized a campaign to restore a village water source, while in Samdrup Jongkhar, youth built seven public toilets to address sanitation issues. These efforts demonstrate how training translates into action, with local leaders increasingly incorporating citizen proposals into official plans.

Rural communities, youth, and local leaders across Bhutan will benefit from greater inclusion in decision-making processes. Ultimately, the entire nation stands to gain from a more informed, engaged citizenry, one that strengthens democracy, fosters accountability, and drives locally led, sustainable development.

Financials



How You Can Make a Difference



\$3,000

Targeted youth programs



\$6,200

One community meeting or workshop



\$150,000

Expand the program to another district





Community members during a training session



A community member participates in a community meeting



Norbu Dema
Country Director



The Bhutan Foundation Thimphu Team

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Bhutan Ecological Society
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Bhutan Institute of Wellbeing
Bhutan Nuns Foundation
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Museums of Bhutan
National Center for Traditional Medicine Services

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Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Ogyen Choling Foundation
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PHENSEM Parents Support Group
Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women
River Guides of Panbang
Royal Society for the Protection and Care of Animals
Royal Textile Academy
Royal Society for the Protection of Nature
Royal Thimphu College
Royal University of Bhutan
Sherchock Women's Group
Tarayana Foundation
Thimphu Dzongkhag Administration
Faculty of Traditional Medicine
Traditional Medicine Hospital
Trongsa Dzongkhag Administration
UNICEF Bhutan
Wangsel Institute for the Deaf
Wangduechoeling Palace Museum and Cultural Center
Water Bhutan
WWF Bhutan
Yangya Foundation
Zhemgang Dzongkhag Administration

International Partners

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Karuna Foundation
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Moderna
MyBhutan LLC
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Squire Patton Boggs
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US Department of State
Wildlife Conservation Network, Pangolin Crisis Fund
Yale University



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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 Bhutan Foundation, bequests will help build strategic reserves, enable growth, and fund more projects.

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