



**NURTURING RURAL PROGRESS
THROUGH DECENTRALIZATION
AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE
PROJECT (2023)**

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Introduction:

The Decentralization and Local Governance Project, Phase II, aims to translate the advancements made in decentralization at the policy and institutional levels into tangible improvements in essential public services. The project will directly benefit citizens across five dzongkhags in the southern, central, and eastern regions of the country. The primary focus is on elevating the living standards of citizens through the enhancement of key public services, including water supply, road infrastructure, and local economic opportunities, with a specific emphasis on sustainable tourism.

The anticipated outcome is an improvement in the overall quality of public services, leading to a positive impact on citizens' well-being. By fostering local economic opportunities, especially for vulnerable groups such as women and youth, the project aims to create a more inclusive and thriving community. To achieve these goals, it is imperative to augment citizens' involvement in decision-making processes and the monitoring of key public services. Additionally, the facilitation of sustainable local economic opportunities is vital for long-term community development.



Challenges Faced by the Community



The Bhutan Living Standard Survey identifies the key concerns for improving living standards, emphasizing the critical importance of consistent water supply, enhanced road infrastructure, and the creation of income and job opportunities. In tandem, the 2022 performance audit by the Royal Audit Authority reveals shortcomings in the formation and operation of Road User Groups, citing issues related to capacity constraints and impractical guidelines. The shift towards decentralized local economic development and job creation, aimed at spreading opportunities in the local communities, aligns with the focus on community-based tourism initiatives. This is considered a vital strategy in the five-year plans of many dzongkhags to boost economic activities and create jobs for the youth and women. However, achieving these goals is hindered by inadequate planning that fails to tap into the strengths and potential of community-based tourism interventions. It is essential to address these issues to leverage the potential and opportunities in the identified dzongkhags.

HELVETAS and our Partner Interventions :

In the first year of implementation, several notable initiatives and milestones have been accomplished. These achievements serve as a testament to the project's commitment to making a meaningful difference in the lives of the citizens in the targeted regions.

Skilling of youth and women:

1. In the Pemgatshel dzongkhag, the Pemagatshel Dzongkhag Administration collaborated with the NLD Training Institute, conducted an immersive food preparation training. Over a two-week period, participants engaged in both theoretical learning and practical hands-on experiences, mastering the techniques of preparing Bhutanese, Continental, and Indian cuisines

A total of 26 enthusiastic youth and women actively participated in this enriching training initiative.

2. Chhukha dzongkhag witnessed similar training endeavors.

A group of 26 participants, comprising homestay owners and campsite operators, predominantly women, actively involved in delivering community-based tourism services in the dzongkhag, took part in these training initiatives.

These programs contribute not only to skill development but also to the empowerment of local entrepreneurs. This strategic advancement aligns with the overarching goal of cultivating sustainable and community-centric tourism practices, ensuring a positive impact on the local economy and tourism sector.



YOUTH AND WOMEN ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM:

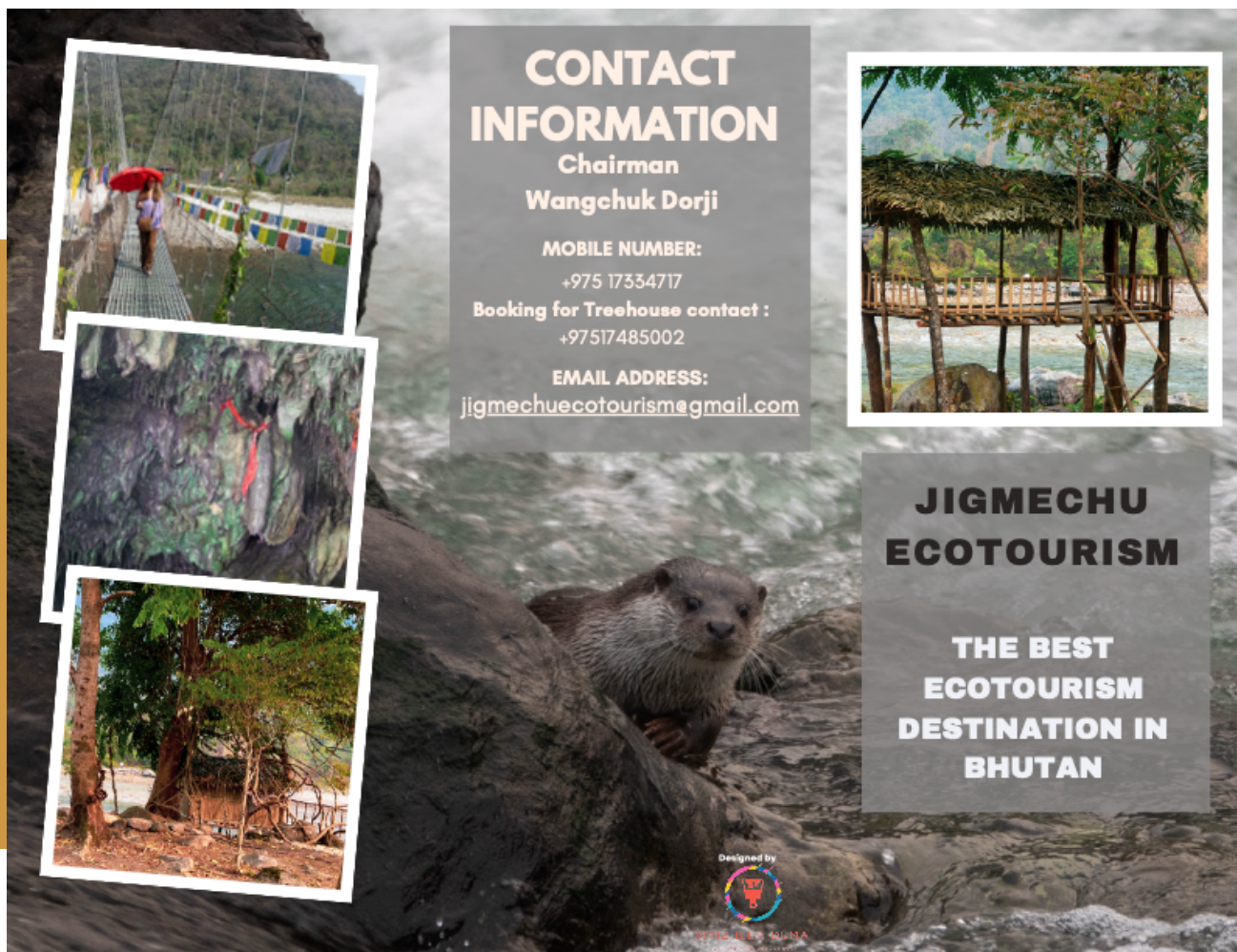
The dynamic engagement of youth and women in community-based tourism initiatives within partner communities in Chukha and Pemagatshel has emerged as a beacon of encouragement and widespread approval. This transformative journey, catalyzed by collaborative efforts led by Helvetas in partnership with the Department of Tourism, local government administrations, and private training institutes, showcases a paradigm shift in community-based tourism (CBT) development. As a result, a dynamic cohort of empowered women and youth has emerged, transforming into active contributors to the evolving tapestry of community-based tourism. Their collective efforts not only enhance the quality of tourism services but also foster a resilient socio-economic fabric within their communities.

FACILITATING B2B EVENTS FOR PROMOTION OF COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM:

In a strategic alliance with the Department of Tourism, local government administrations, and various stakeholders, Dzongkhags facilitated impactful Business-to-Business (B2B) events to establish market linkages in the tourism sector. Notably, Chukha Dzongkhag formed networks with the Association for Conservation and Tourism in northeast India, fostering regional tourism connections.

During World Tourism Day, the Jigmechu Community-Based Tourism Site in Chukha received the prestigious 'Most Performing Community Tourism Destination' award

from the Himalayan Hospitality and Tourism Development Network in North India. This recognition underscores the success of collaborative efforts and the transformative impact of sustainable practices on local tourism. The B2B events provided a platform for Chukha Dzongkhag to establish robust networks, notably with the Association for Conservation and Tourism in northeast India. This cross-border collaboration goes beyond traditional boundaries, fostering regional tourism networks that promise mutual growth and cultural exchange.




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INSTITUTIONAL LINKAGES FOR SKILLING OF WATER AND ROAD CARETAKER:



In a pioneering move, institutional linkages have been established between the Technical Training Institute in Chumey and partner gewogs, namely Bongo and Darla under Chukha Dzongkhag. This transformative partnership, solidified through a formal memorandum of agreement, has paved the way for a significant skill development of road and water caretakers.

Under this collaboration, 33 water and road caretakers have undergone specialized training in plumbing.



These caretakers play a pivotal role in the maintenance and management of water and roads within their communities, contributing to the sustainability of essential infrastructure. Their newfound skills not only enhance the efficiency of day-to-day operations but also exemplify a commitment to local empowerment and self-sufficiency.

The memorandum of agreement serves as a testament to the commitment of all parties involved, highlighting a shared vision for community development through skill enhancement. This strategic partnership not only addresses the immediate needs for skilled personnel in plumbing but also sets the stage for future collaborations that contribute to the overall resilience and self-reliance of local communities.



BRIDGING THE GOVERNANCE GAP: THE CRUCIAL REVIEW AND FINALIZATION OF ROAD AND WATER BY-LAWS:

During consultations with dzongkhags, gewogs, and communities, a critical issue surfaced: the absence of effective by-laws for the governance and management of water and road services. In response, the project proactively addressed this gap by undertaking a comprehensive review of existing by-laws in collaboration with stakeholders such as water user associations, road user groups, gewog administrations, as well as the agriculture and health sectors. Taking a participatory approach, the project engaged an expert panel, comprising sector officials, local administration representatives, and community groups.

Additionally, legal insights from the Bhutan National Legal Institute were sought to ensure the robustness and compliance of the developed by-laws. The end result was the creation of simplified by-laws tailored specifically for road user groups and water user associations.

The first edition of these revised by-laws, a culmination of collaborative efforts and legal expertise, was officially published in December 2023.

འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ཀྱི་འབྲུག་པ་ཚེས་ལཱ་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་པའི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་

Bylaw - Water User Association

འབྲུག་ཚོགས་པའི་མིང་: འབྲུག་ཚོགས་པ།
Water User Association

གཞི་ལོག
Gewog:

གཞི་བཙུགས་ཆེས་གྲངས་:
Date of Establishment

རྒྱུ་ / Year

འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ཀྱི་འབྲུག་པ་ཚེས་ལཱ་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་པའི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་

ROAD USER GROUP BYLAW

གཞི་ལོག་བདག་སྐྱོང་ GEWOG ADMINISTRATION

རྫོང་ལག་ DZONGKHAG

གིང་ལམ། FARM ROAD

རྒྱུ་ལོ། Year

This proactive measure not only addresses a critical governance gap but also reflects a commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and legal soundness in the management of essential community services.

The publication marks a significant milestone in the project’s dedication to fostering effective governance and community-led management of water and road services

PERSONAL STORIES OF COOKING/HOMESTAY TRAININGS

Lekey Dorji: A Symphony of Cleanliness and Confidence

In the charming village of Jigmechu, Lekey Dorji embarked on a culinary adventure that would shape not only his dishes but also his confidence in the kitchen. As he reflects on the transformative process, he emphasizes his focus on cleanliness and the art of presenting food. Lekey faced significant challenges on his path to mastering the culinary arts. He encountered challenges in identifying various equipment and food names, posing a formidable hurdle on his path to becoming a skilled Chef. Nevertheless, Lekey's resourcefulness demonstrated a blend of modern approaches and clever thinking. Unyielding in the face of challenges, he embraced contemporary tools, boldly stating, **"I turn on YouTube and Google to find solutions."**

Likewise, Chitra Kumar and Ranjit Gurung echo similar narratives of grappling with challenges in recognizing various kitchen equipment and deciphering the names of dishes. However, their stories are tales of resilience and determination, as both individuals not only overcame these hurdles but also acquired new skills crucial for preparing and presenting food to guests. The culinary training program went beyond teaching practical skills; it instilled newfound confidence in participants like Lekey. His comfort in presenting food and the aspiration to create a personal menu epitomize the essence of culinary empowerment. This collective journey reflects the harmonious integration of tradition and modern resources, showcasing participants' adaptability and creativity in overcoming challenges and shaping unique culinary identities



Kinzang Dekey: Beyond the Kitchen to Pride and Confidence

In the serene setting of Dekis Homestay in Mebisa Chhukha, Kinzang Dekey's culinary journey takes center stage. "Yes, the training benefited me; I also feel more confident in preparing dining experiences for guests," Kinzang enthusiastically expresses, revealing the immediate positive impact of the training on her culinary skills and confidence. However, the path to culinary excellence was not devoid of challenges for Kinzang.

Reflecting on the training, she acknowledges, **"While we train, we make some mistakes while preparing food, but we get help from our chef, and we learn in a better way."**

Kinzang's aspirations transcend the boundaries of the kitchen; she envisions a brighter future for Dekis Homestay. Kinzang's dreams capture the broader impact of culinary training, not only enhancing individual skills but also contributing to the growth and promotion of the homestay. Her pride in cooking and eagerness to acquire additional skills exemplify the transformative power of culinary education, promising a more prosperous future for Dekis Homestay and its guests



Cheychey, a passionate cook and homestay host.

Cheychey, a passionate cook and homestay host, shares insights into how training has transformed her culinary skills and dining presentations.

She reflects on the positive impact of the training, stating, "The training has benefited me in various ways; firstly, it made me more familiar with different ingredients and ways to prepare food."

Cheychey emphasizes the newfound confidence she has gained in both cooking and presenting meals, attributing it to the training. She advocates for a diverse culinary exploration, suggesting, "In my opinion, it would be better to explore foods from different nationalities, such as Western and Asian foods."

However, Cheychey acknowledges the challenges faced during the learning process,

particularly with unfamiliar ingredient names. She shares, "For me, the challenges are mostly catching up with the names of the ingredients since they were not familiar to me till I got the training." Despite these hurdles, the training has propelled her towards a more promising future.

Cheychey expresses her aspirations, saying, "The training has made me more capable of presenting different meals, and I am confident even if I run a decent restaurant. However, I am looking forward to getting more training so that I can be better in this field."

With determination and a passion for continuous improvement, Cheychey envisions further improving her skills in the culinary field.





Conclusion:

In summary, this report sheds light on the impact of DLGP-II interventions on rural Bhutan. With a strategic focus on tourism and governance improvements, the collaborative efforts of over 500 local leaders have successfully addressed challenges in road and water management. Noteworthy initiatives include specialized training programs for water and road caretakers, as well as initiatives empowering youth and women in the realm of community-based tourism.

Beyond statistics and projects, the report weaves a tapestry of inspiring personal stories. Individuals who have undergone project initiatives emerge not just with newfound skills but also with a heightened sense of confidence. These narratives serve as living proof of the tangible, positive changes that HELVETAS and our partners has brought to the lives of Bhutan's rural residents. These stories encapsulate our commitments to sustainable development and showcase its role as a transformative agent in the communities it serves, leaving a lasting legacy of empowerment and progress.



**Department of Local Governance and
Disaster Management, Ministry of Home
Affairs**