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# ANNUAL REPORT 2024

*Navigating New Horizons*



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“As a nation, we are at an inflection point. Our actions today will determine the course of our future, and put us either in the path of success or failure. There will not be any more opportunities, and we have no choice but to work with the greatest sense of urgency.”

*His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck*

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# CONTENTS

## 06 IMPACT MAP

Mapping the Foundation's impact across Bhutan.

## 08 SMALL GRANTS, BIG IMPACT

Seven small grants fund innovative projects from community beekeeping to shiitake mushroom farming.

## 28 ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Local communities work together to preserve Bhutan's beauty and improve their livelihoods.

## 36 HEALTH & TECHNOLOGY

Improving community health and developing inclusive technology.

## 48 CULTURE & COMMUNITY

Honoring Bhutan's rich culture and history.

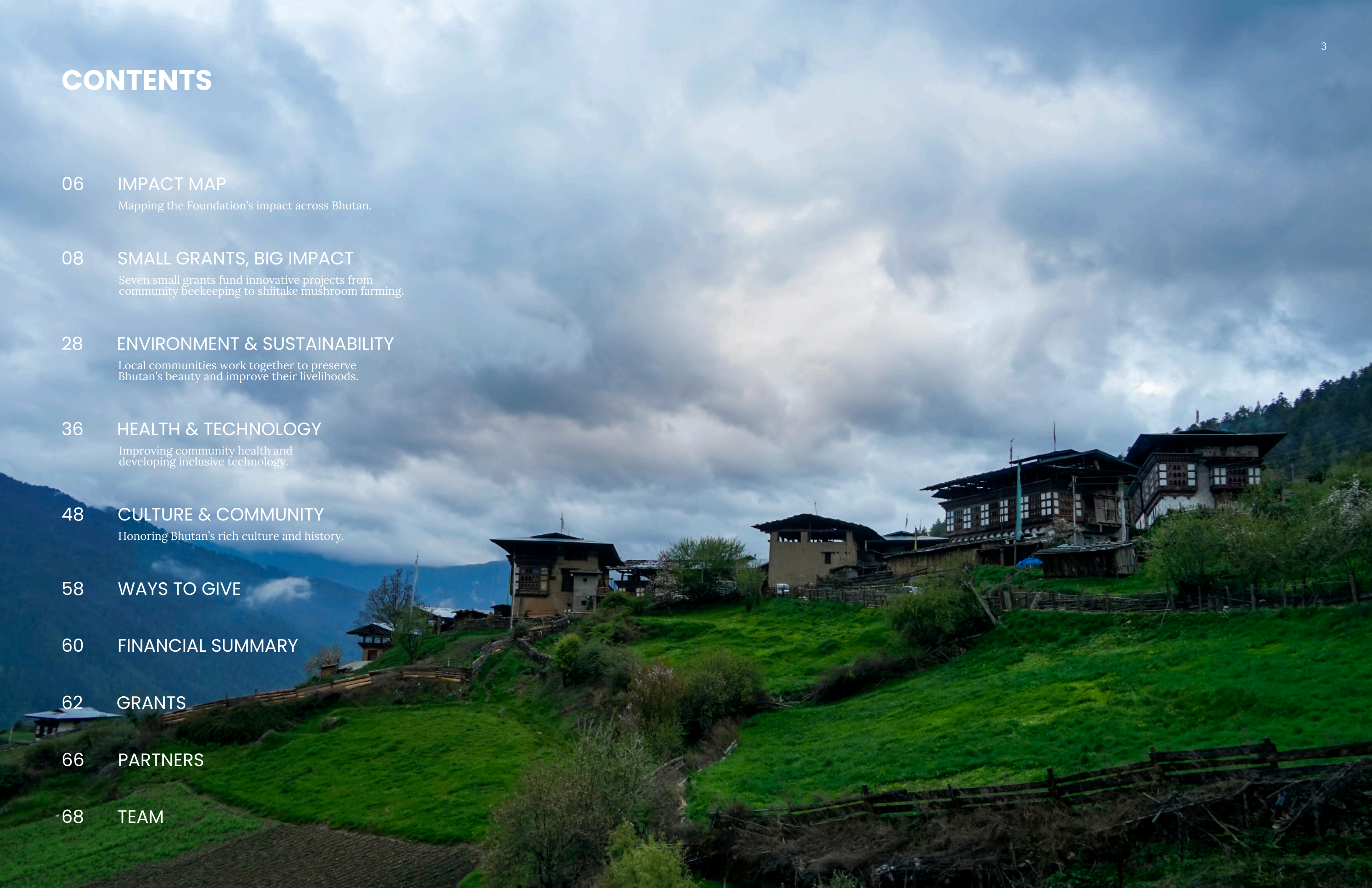
## 58 WAYS TO GIVE

## 60 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

## 62 GRANTS

## 66 PARTNERS

## 68 TEAM





## WORDS FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

Bhutan stands at a pivotal crossroads in its development journey. Inspired by His Majesty the King's vision of the Gelephu Mindfulness City, it is crucial that we align our efforts to support the foundational areas that will contribute to this grand vision. Just as Bhutan has embraced technology and innovation as pathways to progress, the Bhutan Foundation has ventured into new horizons to fulfill our mission of building local capacity and facilitating global support.

Our recent initiatives to bolster STEM education align with national priorities and education reforms, aiming to create a generation of well-educated youth ready to drive innovation. To support an inclusive society, our special education program has introduced assistive technology for children and people with disabilities. Additionally, the Digitize Dratshang project is training monks in digital inventory and archiving, equipping them to be better custodians of Bhutan's cultural and spiritual heritage in this technological age. These initiatives integrate technology and innovation while upholding Bhutan's values of sustainable and equitable development.

Significant milestones have been achieved in our projects. The Wangduechhoeling Palace Museum and Cultural Centre is set to be consecrated in October, marking a key moment in preserving Bhutan's rich heritage. Our Million Tree Project has grown into the Great People's Forest initiative with 10 million trees planted, and our nomad health camps have successfully delivered vital healthcare services to underserved communities. A new focus in health and wellness is strengthening Bhutan's traditional medicine system.

Our Small Grants Program has expanded significantly, supporting eight new projects this year—the highest number to date. This program helps us nurture grassroots innovation and entrepreneurship across Bhutan, with projects ranging from water conservation and ecotourism to agribusiness and app development, often evolving into impactful larger initiatives.

I am pleased to share the **Bhutan Foundation Annual Report 2024: Navigating New Horizons**, reflecting our ongoing commitment to sustainable development across Bhutan. These featured projects exemplify the resilience and creativity of the Bhutanese people in pursuing sustainable, community-driven opportunities.

The Bhutan Foundation remains steadfast in our mission to support Bhutan's development journey, balancing progress with the preservation of cultural heritage and environmental integrity. We are deeply grateful for the continued support from our donors, partners, and communities, which makes this important work possible.



Her Majesty  
Gyalyum Tseyring Pem Wangchuck  
Co-Chair

## NAVIGATING NEW HORIZONS

Over the last twelve months, the Bhutan Foundation has ventured into new horizons doing what we do best: strengthening the fundamental building blocks of social development. While culture, healthcare, education, and food security remain at the center of our programmatic thrust, the consistent application of our approach is bearing fruit in transforming the Wangduechhoeling Palace into a Museum and Cultural Centre. A legacy project for the Bhutan Foundation, the Palace is a unique heritage site that will soon be ready to welcome local Bhutanese as well as you and your friends.

In healthcare, the nomad health camps are now officially integrating several traditional Bhutanese therapeutics thereby reaching underserved communities as well as offering diverse treatment options for the patients. Assessing the status of Traditional Bhutanese Medicine has become highly relevant as we help promote it and make this healing form more accepted in today's Bhutan.

In the space of children and people with disabilities, we have helped develop assistive technologies to make learning and living easier, in collaboration with the fabrication labs, technical colleges, and Bhutanese innovators. We are now on the cusp of rolling out a large initiative in STEM education in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Skills Development.

The Bhutan Foundation Small Grants Program strengthens support in the areas of ecotourism, food security, special education, and entrepreneurship—all necessary to help Bhutan's current economy grow. In the past year, we have successfully supported several projects through this program. More importantly, the program allows us to remain vigilant and responsive to Bhutan's emerging needs as manifested in the numerous proposals submitted to this program.

We continue to engage with our local partners on many projects while, as an American non-profit that is solely focused on Bhutan, we seek out new international partnerships that can inform, instruct and support our programs. The Foundation continues to promote Bhutan in the United States by hosting events and gatherings throughout the year.

As always, we remain grateful to our numerous local and international partners and thankful for the support of our donors in enabling us to further our mission. Our active board of directors and advisory council members provide guidance to help us stay on course. Thus, it is with great confidence that we chart our course navigating new horizons to support the resiliency of the people of Bhutan through our programs.

With gratitude,

Daphne Hoch Cunningham  
Co-Chair

Tshewang Wangchuk  
Executive Director



# IMPACT MAP: FY2024 Programs\*



 \*Location of projects covered in this annual report



# SMALL GRANTS, BIG IMPACT

The Small Grants Program supports grassroots initiatives across Bhutan, focusing on empowering communities, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting sustainable development. This year, we awarded grants to innovative projects that address pressing challenges such as economic resilience, environmental conservation, and social inclusion. By providing financial and technical support to local organizations, the program fosters community-driven solutions that create lasting impact and contribute to the well-being of Bhutanese society.



# SMALL GRANTS

The Bhutan Foundation's Small Grants Program empowers local communities by providing targeted support for innovative and impactful projects. In 2024, we funded seven initiatives to enhance livelihoods, preserve cultural heritage, and promote social inclusion. From revitalizing essential water sources and advancing traditional medicine practices to supporting community-based beekeeping and improving resources for individuals with substance use disorders, these grants are driving meaningful change.

Each recipient is committed to resilience, sustainability, and community development, reflecting our shared vision for a prosperous and inclusive future.



Each of the Small Grants Program recipients, while diverse in the nature of their work, has a mission closely aligned with upholding one of the pillars of Gross National Happiness and are actively involved in making a significant positive impact in their local community in Bhutan.





# WATER BHUTAN:

## Reviving Budrel Waterfall

Water Bhutan is dedicated to preserving the Budrel Waterfall, a vital water source for Kuenga Rabten and Changren communities, which serve 250 households in Trongsa Dzongkhag in north central Bhutan. The restoration project aims to ensure continuous water flow and mitigate future erosion.

### Grant Supports:

- Detailed site survey and preparatory work for restoration.
- Raising awareness about natural resource management and the waterfall's importance.



 2 villages

 200+ acres

 250 households



The fields of Kuenga Rabten and Changren communities will benefit from the revived waterfall.



## MENJONG SORIG PHARMACEUTICALS:

Enhancing the Supply Chain for Traditional Medicines

Menjong Sorig Pharmaceuticals Corporation Limited (MSPCL) is dedicated to preserving Bhutan's traditional healing practices, known as Sowa Rigpa, by ensuring a consistent supply of high-quality raw materials. With the support of the Small Grants Program, MSPCL plans to construct a post-harvest center in Langthel that will help preserve traditional knowledge, boost the local economy, strengthen the supply chain for traditional medicines, and ensure the quality and availability of medicinal plants.

### Grant Supports:

- Constructing a one-story post-harvest center.
- Raising awareness and encouraging villagers to join Namther Menrig Group or participate in medicinal plant collection.
- Establishing an enclosed garden dedicated to preserving and cultivating low-altitude medicinal plants.



Preparing traditional herbs after drying for production.



## GUENGALING COMMUNITY COOPERATIVE:

Community-based Beekeeping for Economic Resilience



In Guengaling Village, Samtse District, Mer Man Gurung and the emerging Guengaling Community Cooperative are tackling rural economic challenges and reducing youth migration through community-based beekeeping. The initiative aims to diversify economic opportunities and encourage youth to build their future within their community.

### Grant Supports:

- Training 37 participants in modern beekeeping techniques.
- Distributing 9 beehives to 35 households.
- Providing business skills training and best practices.
- Distributing 2 honey filters and 30 honey jars.



*Beekeeping in Bhutan*

**70.5%**

of Bhutan is forest, and home to

**6**

species of honey bee

**4**

native to the Hindu-Kush Himalayan region

**18,000**

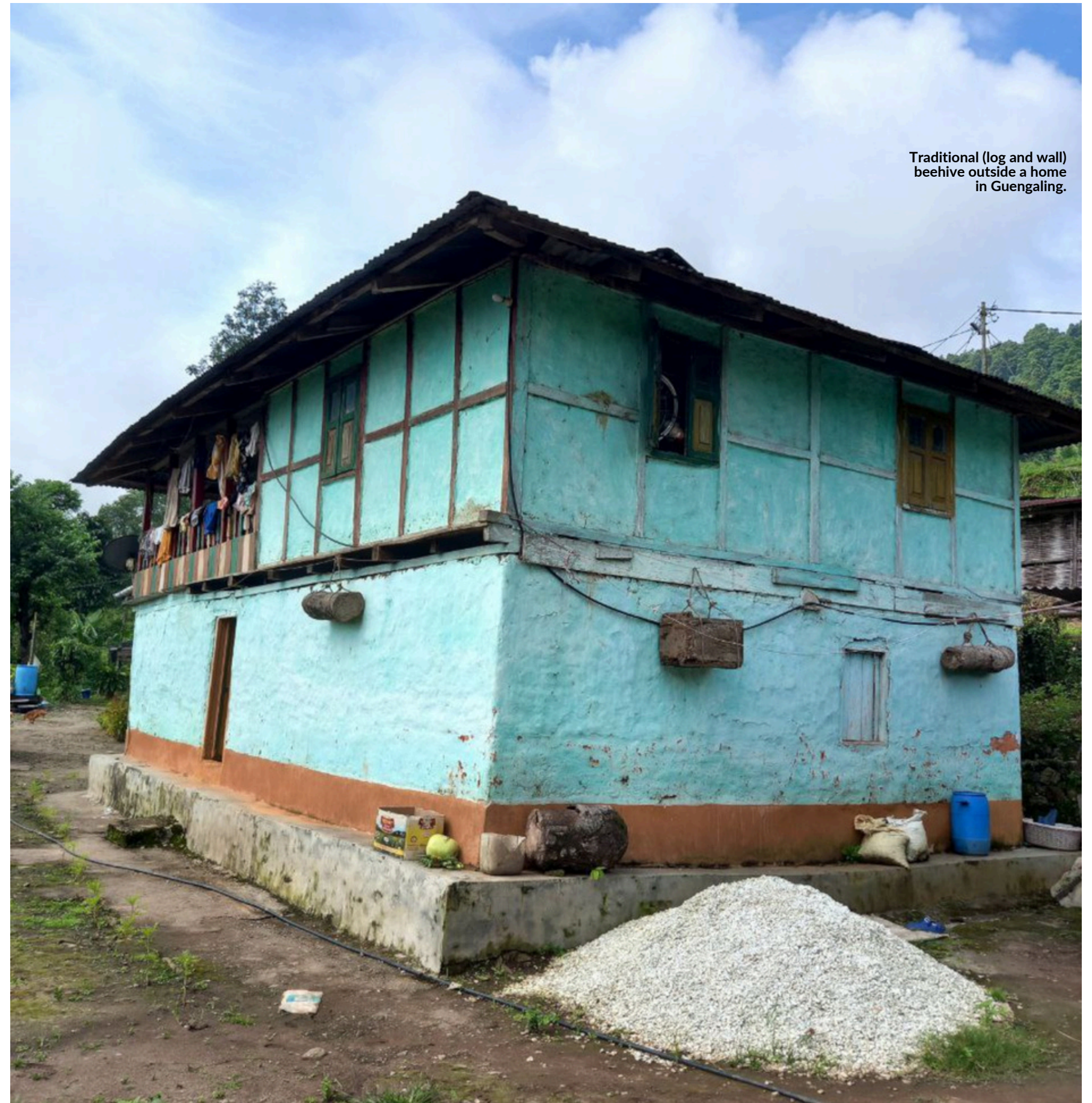
estimated bee colonies in traditional & modern hives

but

more than

**50,000**

managed hives are needed for efficient crop pollination



Traditional (log and wall) beehive outside a home in Guengaling.



## BHUTAN INSTITUTE OF WELLBEING:

Reintegration and Skills Development Program for Individuals with Substance Use Disorders

The Bhutan Institute of Wellbeing in Chimithangkha is strengthening its reintegration program for individuals with substance use disorders (SUDs) with the addition of skill development training. This initiative addresses substance use and related challenges by offering practical skills that facilitate successful reintegration into society.

### Grant Supports:

- Introducing oyster and shitake mushroom cultivation and hydroponic farming.
- Developing an instructional manual for future SUD cohorts.
- Integrating skill development with mindfulness, well-being practices, and psychosocial therapy.



Program participants at the Bhutan Institute of Wellbeing.



## DARKALA YAK COOPERATIVE:

Enhancing Sustainable Livelihoods



The Darkala Yak Cooperative, a community-based organization under the Bhutan Yak Federation, supports 39 households with approximately 2,400 yaks in Dagala Gewog. This Cooperative focuses on diversifying yak products to improve local livelihoods in a region where livestock plays a vital role.

### Grant Supports:

- Introducing high-value yak cheeses like *Tomme* and *Gumdel*.
- Providing training and modern equipment for quality cheese production.
- Strengthening local capacity through comprehensive development programs.



 39 households

 2400 yaks



Members of the Darkala Yak Cooperative pour fresh yak milk to make cheeses.



# WANGSEL INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF:

Connecting Communities through  
Bhutanese Sign Language

The Wangsel Institute for the Deaf has introduced a mobile app for Bhutanese Sign Language (BhSL) to bridge the communication gap between the deaf and hearing communities. Launched on December 3, 2023, the app is designed to support early learning and improve family communication.

## Grant Supports:

- Upgrading the BhSL app with additional features and syntax for better user engagement.
- Integrating the app with a new website as a comprehensive resource for Bhutanese sign language.
- Expanding outreach and advocacy efforts to promote inclusive learning and community integration.



Students at Wangsel  
Institute for the Deaf.



## SHERCHOK WOMEN'S GROUP:

### Empowering Bhutanese Women in Agribusiness

For generations, Bhutanese women have been the backbone of food production, security, and rural development in Bhutan. Now they are stepping into new roles, not just as farmers but as entrepreneurs and leaders across the agribusiness value chain.

Inspired by the Self-Employed Women's Association in Ahmedabad, Chimmi Dema, originally a civil servant with a passion for textiles, founded the Sherchok Women's Group. Today, it boasts 360 members across Bhutan, providing economic opportunities and empowering women to transition from home-based workers to successful entrepreneurs.

However, their agricultural products have struggled to meet packaging and labeling standards, leading to a decline in sales and market position. Recognizing these issues, the group is embarking on a strategic rebranding and production upgrade.

With the right support and training, these women will lead the way in creating sustainable, community-driven economic growth. Their story is not just about economic empowerment, however; it's about transforming the role of women in Bhutanese society and ensuring that they are recognized as leaders and innovators in their communities.

#### Grant Supports:

- Automating processing units and developing a unique brand
- Conducting specialized packaging and labeling training for eight core members in Gelephu
- Conducting entrepreneurship training for 80 members across three regions



Sherchok women sort peppers.

### Agriculture in Bhutan

**55%**

employed in  
agriculture

**3.7 ac**

average  
smallholder  
acreage

**37%**

subsistence  
farming only

**53%**

subsistence  
farming  
with some sales

**57**

average minutes  
more per day rural  
women spend  
working than men



# BIG IMPACT

The Bhutan Foundation's Small Grants Program continues to significantly impact various sectors by supporting projects that address critical needs and foster sustainable development. The 2024 recipients, through their innovative approaches and dedicated efforts, are not only improving immediate conditions but also laying the groundwork for long-term progress and resilience within their communities. By investing in these initiatives, we are advancing our mission to empower individuals, preserve cultural heritage, and build a more inclusive society. The collective achievements of these projects underscore the transformative power of targeted support and community-driven solutions.



Top Left: Workers at Menjong Sorig unload supplies.

Bottom Left: A patient at Bumthang Nomadic Health Camp.

Bottom Center: Members of the Sherchok Women's Group.

Bottom Right: Yak herders undergoing a training session on French cheese-making processes, conducted by the National Highland Development Centre.

Top Left: A yak herder in Darkala.

Top Right: An agricultural site at the Bhutan Institute of Wellbeing that will be introduced as part of the reintegration program.





# ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY





## ECO-TOURISM:

### New Opportunities in Chhukha

Bhutan's rich biodiversity, pristine environment, and strong conservation policies make it an ideal ecotourism destination. However, poor infrastructure, limited local capacity, and a lack of private investment hinder ecotourism here.

In collaboration with government agencies, national CSOs, and community-based organizations, the Foundation has supported various ecotourism programs: homestays in Jomolhari, the annual Jomolhari Mountain Festival, and community-based ecotourism ventures like the Marang Jungle Lodge, the River Guides in Pangbang, and the Katsho eco-camp at Haa.

In 2023, through the Foundation's Small Grants Program, the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature worked with the Chhukha district administration to create an eco-tourism campsite on 5 acres of leased state land in Jigmechhu along the Wangchhu River in Bongo Gewog, Chhukha district. Using the Foundation's grants, the Society built critical infrastructure such as campsites, trails, toilets, dining areas, and lodges and developed a business plan and promotional materials.

**Traditionally dependent on citrus orchards and agriculture, the community embraces sustainable tourism to diversify income and improve livelihoods while conserving its pristine environment and local culture.**







Campsite infrastructure at Jigmechhu Eco Camp.

Eight dedicated community members teamed up to construct an eco-campsite that blends with the natural landscape and offers stunning river views.

Jigmechhu Eco-Camp is a model of sustainable development, demonstrating how integrated community efforts can lead to the successful preservation of local culture and environment.

**In less than a year, the campsite has welcomed more than 600 guests.**

Under the Chhukha Dzongkhag administration, the Jigmechhu Ecotourism Group won the "Most Performing Community Tourist Destination" award at the Himalayan Hospitality and Tourism Awards in West Bengal, India.

Mr. Gongto, the Ecotourism Group secretary, told us, "We are expecting to receive more guests in the coming season and are planning to expand the eco-lodge to accommodate more visitors."



## HIGHLAND HARMONY: Snow Leopard Conservation and Community Revival



Globally, the snow leopard is threatened due to habitat degradation, natural resource extraction, poaching, retaliatory killings, and the changing alpine ecosystem. However, in the alpine region of Bhutan, the elusive snow leopard finds a sanctuary where it can flourish.

A recent national snow leopard survey recorded an increase in the snow leopard population by 39.5% compared to the last survey in 2016. They are found especially in the Northwestern region of Bhutan that is Jigme Dorji National Park, Wangchuck Centennial Park, Jigme Khesar Strict Nature Reserve, and the area under Paro Forest Division.

The increase in population is attributed to Bhutan's strong conservation measures, solid support from highland communities, and low threats to the species.

Bhutan's alpine region is also home to 628 households herding some 35,000 yaks. The herders have been sharing the landscape with snow leopards and their primary prey, Blue Sheep, for generations.

Herders depend mainly on yaks and high-altitude medicinal herbs for additional income. When snow leopards prey on yak calves, they threaten these communities' livelihoods.

Under Soe Gewog, we supported the Soe Lanor Cooperative in a program to diversify yak products. The cooperative purchased yak product processing equipment such as a deep freezer, cheese slicer, and vacuum packaging and trained 30 group members on the hygienic processing of yak cheese. "The group has processed more than 100 kgs of yak cheese," reported group chairman Sonam Dorji.

Through its Small Grants Program, the Foundation also helped Dagala Yak cooperatives in Dagala Gewog under Thimphu establish high-quality, hygienic yak cheese processing units. We are hopeful that this yak cheese will become a steady source of income for highland communities in Bhutan.

**We believe that engaging the local communities in conservation programs that also supplement their livelihood is key to keeping their support and ensuring harmonious coexistence with the big cats.**

In 2023, in collaboration with the Department of Livestock, we supplied 91 improved tents to the Jomolhari highlands and Jigme Khesar Strict Nature Reserve. The highlanders buy at least two plastic tents each year.

Mr. Tobgay, one of the beneficiaries from Yaksa village, told us, "Earlier all herders used traditional tent 'Bja' but since it is tough to make, most herders now use the readily available flimsy plastic sheet as the herders' tents." He is hopeful that the improved tents will reduce plastic waste and provide more comfortable living conditions in the mountains.



## FROM FIELDS TO FAMILIES: Promoting Sustainable Agriculture

**In Bhutan, arable land is scattered among steep mountain terrain.**

Agriculture employs more than half of Bhutan's population. As the cornerstone of the rural economy, agriculture is key to alleviating poverty and increasing rural prosperity. However, this sector faces challenges such as rural-urban migration and an aging farming population.

The Bhutan Foundation, in partnership with the government and national civil society organizations (CSOs), has developed a program to promote sustainable, climate-adapted agriculture practices that support Bhutan's national food security objectives.

In partnership with the Tarayana Foundation, the Bhutan Foundation assisted remote communities in five districts: Haa, Tsirang, Mongar, Trashigang, and Lhuntse.

Ten community Self-Help Groups (SHGs) received technical training, agricultural equipment, market access, and financial support to become professional and sustainable players in the economic value chain.

The Tsekpa Self-Help Group in Jurmey Gewog, Mongar is a notable success story. Over three years, the group has expanded from 8 to 26 households. Mr. Sangay Yeshi, the group's chairman and a trained lead farmer, noted that most members initially practiced subsistence farming. However, after learning about crop cultivation, financial management, and equipment operation, all members scaled up their agricultural production and began selling products at local markets.



**Above: Women work in the rice paddies.  
At left: A farmer tends to his cabbage crop.**

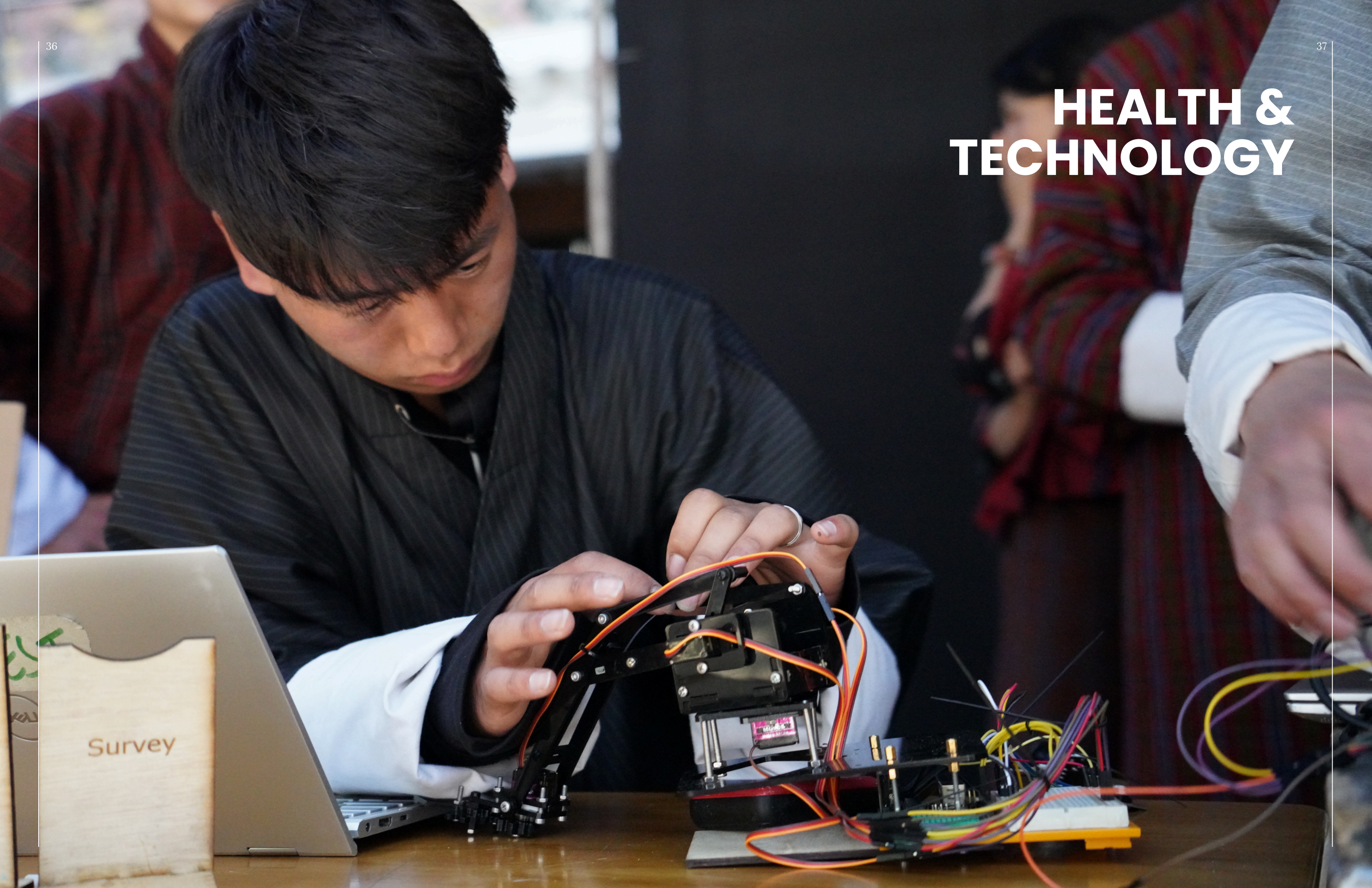
In 2023, they piloted growing 100 kg of Azuki beans with promising results and are now expanding Azuki bean production to 300 kg. They plan to increase ginger cultivation and hope that a new road connecting their village to the highway, about 8 km away, will reduce transportation costs.

The Darna Self-Help Group in Darna Village, Lumang Gewog, began with 25 members. Before the foundation's support, they practiced subsistence farming and lacked equipment. They had to travel about one and a half hours to a nearby community to process crops like maize, buckwheat, and mustard seeds. Mr. Ngawang Gyeltshen, the group's chairman, said that receiving electric maize grinders, buckwheat grinders, and mustard oil expellers has eased that burden. They also received training in crop production and financial management.

Mr. Sangay Wangdi, a group member, reported that learning basic farming techniques through the agricultural training program helped optimize his yields. However, the lack of a proper market often led to spoilage, so the group plans to establishing a food processing unit and market facility at Lumang Gewog.



# HEALTH & TECHNOLOGY





## ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

At some point in life, everyone may need assistive devices to aid in daily activities, either temporarily or permanently. To address this crucial need, we set out to establish an assistive technology (AT) ecosystem in Bhutan.

We began by supporting both innovators and educators at the EMPOWER Conference on Assistive Technology in Chennai.

Later, in collaboration with the Phensem Parent Support Group in Thimphu, we launched an AT demo center to provide individuals with disabilities and their families the opportunity to experience various AT devices. This center allows families to find and customize the technology that best suits their needs.

Partnering with the Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck Super Fab Lab, we organized the Fab Fest and the Innovation Challenge, bringing together innovators, educators, students, and individuals with disabilities. Innovators designed, prototyped, and showcased their assistive solutions.

At right: A young innovator sharing his ideas of assistive devices for children with disabilities at FabFest 2023.







The Fab Fest included interactive exhibitions where parents, teachers, and students could engage with innovators, providing valuable feedback to improve designs. Similarly, Innovation Challenge participants met with children with disabilities and their families to understand their challenges, ensuring the solutions developed were practical and impactful.

**The enthusiasm and talent displayed by college and high school students at the Innovation Challenge highlighted the potential for youth to drive innovation in AT. As youth with disabilities grow into adults with disabilities, their peers will be the best advocates for building an inclusive future.**

Our efforts align with Bhutan's broader vision for STEM education. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Skills Development, we are also supporting the STEM Premier School, which will provide a platform for future opportunities in assistive technology.

The Bhutan Foundation is committed to fostering an inclusive future by supporting the development and accessibility of assistive technology.



Top left: Teachers and parents brainstorm ways to adapt daily use items to create low-tech assistive technology. Above: A young woman works on her design for assistive hardware. Right: Young innovators discuss their designs.



## RESEARCH AND CAPACITY BUILDING



Conducting sample tests for immunogenicity study.

Through Bhutan Foundation, Moderna Biotechnology supported the collaborative project "Observational Study on COVID-19 Vaccine Immunogenicity and Reactogenicity in Bhutan." The project has significantly advanced genomic sequencing capacity at the Royal Centre for Disease Control (RCDC).

Genomic sequencing technology will enhance RCDC's research and diagnostic capabilities, enabling more comprehensive genetic studies. This positions RCDC to combat future epidemics more effectively, ensuring better preparedness and responsiveness to public health challenges. The project has led to impactful training and workshops. The institutionalizing science advice workshop enhances the university's role in shaping government

policies for better science and technology outcomes. Study visits have strengthened research collaborations, public health initiatives, and laboratory and medical education in Bhutan.

The 2024 CyberSecPhil Conference enhances the university's cybersecurity by addressing new threats, adopting technologies, ensuring compliance, and improving incident response. Participants trained in this area will soon train Bhutanese laboratory staff in September 2024.

Trainees are now acting as resource persons and research supervisors at the university. Training at Mahidol University is advancing laboratory capabilities, particularly in DNA sequencing, bioinformatics, and data analysis. This supports the upgrade of the Diploma in Laboratory Technology to a bachelor's level and advances research in clinical and molecular biology, benefiting education and healthcare in Bhutan.



## INTERVENTION IN EARLY CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT

The Bhutan Foundation seeks to enhance the development and well-being of all children. Early childhood development intervention lays the foundation for lifelong learning and good health. It can address speech delays, learning disabilities, and social challenges, improving outcomes in education, relationships, and overall well-being.

In partnership with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, Ability Bhutan Society, and Perkins School for the Blind, the Bhutan Foundation trained 39 facilitators in Inclusive Early Child Care and Development (ECCD) centers across Bhutan. Training included hands-on practice and field visits.

At the Changangkha ECCD center, facilitator Dhan Maya used person-centered planning (PCP) to help Tshewang, a young girl with visual impairment. Maya emphasized collaborative goal-setting and individualized support.

**Four-year old Tshewang went from struggling with basic tasks to eating by herself, communicating her wants, and engaging with peers.**

Her progress was a testament to the effectiveness of PCP and to Dhan Maya's enthusiasm, dedication, and commitment.



**Bottom left: Students work together using assistive technology. Bottom right: Participants in an Inclusive Early Child Care and Development training learn together.**

## Education & Poverty in Bhutan

In households where the head has completed at least secondary school, the rate of child poverty is

**11.7%**



In households where the head has no education, the rate of child poverty is

**41.7%**

almost four times higher.

At Tendruk Central School in southern Bhutan, the Tendruk ECCD faces a lack of resources and low community awareness. Despite these obstacles, the school and its Special Educational Needs unit remain determined to support children with disabilities. Experts from Perkins School for the Blind provided strategies to strengthen relationships between facilitators, children, and families, addressing the community's awareness gap and fostering parental support.



## ENHANCING HEALTH SECURITY

The Bhutan Foundation continues to support efforts to provide healthcare to the most isolated communities of Bhutan.

Annual health camps have consistently benefitted Bhutan's yak-herder populations. This year's camp featured specialist doctors, including dentists, eye and ear specialists, orthopedic surgeons, physiotherapists, and traditional healers.

In addition, a team from Wangduechoeling Hospital made its first visit to the Khangthang Nomadic Community, which is a two-day journey on foot from the hospital. The team included doctors, a traditional medicine doctor, a dental surgeon, a clinical nurse, a pharmacy technician, a laboratory technician, a physiotherapist, and an ultrasound technician. They:

- Refilled medications for hypertension and type 2 diabetes.
- Conducted awareness sessions on hygienic practices like regular handwashing.
- Provided information on the health impacts of open defecation.
- Offered guidance on safe drinking water.
- Educated on safe sex practices to prevent STIs.



A member of the medical team takes a woman's blood pressure.



### Minor Surgery

The team performed several minor surgeries at the Tshampa Camp, located 4500 meters above sea level and home to around 100 herders.

Procedures included:

- Incision and drainage of an abscess on a woman's lower back, with antibiotics provided post-operation.
- Removal of a painful ganglion cyst on a man's right wrist.
- Excision of a sebaceous cyst from a woman's left preauricular area.
- Removal of a lipoma on a man's right arm.



### Bumthang's Nomadic Health Challenges

Bumthang is home to the highest nomadic population in Bhutan. The Bhutan Foundation has supported annual Nomad Health Camps here since 2017.

The medical staff saw around 121 patients in seven nomadic communities in Bumthang. They:

- Detected chronic health problems like leprosy, tuberculosis, non-communicable diseases, and other infections, and planned follow-ups/referrals.
- Provided basic blood tests for hemoglobin, blood sugar, and sexually transmitted diseases (HIV, Hepatitis B, Syphilis).
- Conducted health education on important issues.
- Screened for intra-abdominal pathologies such as liver/lung cysts from echinococcus infection and perform pregnancy-related ultrasounds.
- Tested to assess the quality of drinking water.



Top left: A doctor gives a knee injection at the nomad health camp. Center: Herders listen to a presentation by the team on hygiene, safe drinking water, and safe sex. Bottom left: Giving an ultrasound. Bottom right: Refilling medication for hypertension and type 2 diabetes. Top right: Doctors perform minor surgery.





# CULTURE & COMMUNITY





## EVOLVING CULTURE:

### Bhutan's Monks in the Digital Age

Bhutan's monastic institution is the country's oldest form of education, predating modern schooling by centuries. Traditionally, and still today, monks have been the custodians of sacred relics, treasures, manuscripts, and ethnographic objects housed in the many temples and dzongs of Bhutan.

However, the digital age is transforming how people live, interact, and work. The monastic institution must adapt to these changes in order to preserve Bhutan's cultural heritage.

To that end, the U.S. Ambassador's Fund and the Bhutan Foundation have launched the Conservation of Ancient and Historic Buddhist Ethnographic Objects Project, led by Her Serene Highness Princess Kesang Choden T. Wangchuck, Executive Director of the Buddhist Art & Culture Conservation Center under the Antiquities Department of the Central Monastic Body.



Monks gather around a digital camera to learn how to operate it.



According to Ashi Kesang, it is their vision “to serve as a platform for shared cultural continuity in Bhutan and the Himalayan region.

The three main deities at the core of Buddhism—Vajrapani, Manjushri, and Avalokiteshvara—embody Conservation (with Vajrapani as guardian), Continuity (with Manjushri as teacher of wisdom), and Compassion (with Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, representing the cultivation of Bodhichitta, the essence of all Buddhist practice).”

For the first time, monks are using technology to aid in preserving and safeguarding Bhutan's rich heritage. They are learning to operate professional cameras to document artifacts and use computer database systems to digitally archive them.

The DHI Innotech Department conducted a workshop on digital literacy for 39 monks representing 20 districts. The monks received an orientation on advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain, enabling them to see how these tools can align with and even support their responsibilities—not only preserving tangible aspects of Bhutanese culture but also helping Buddhist values remain relevant in a fast-changing world.

Lopen Namgyal, the Head of the Antiquities Department, noted that despite their initial apprehension, the monks were eager to learn and adopt new technologies.

**This initiative will help bridge the gap between past and present, making Bhutanese culture and heritage accessible for a younger generation.**

A monk works to photodocument a cultural artifact.



## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



A young girl performs community mapping.

In the 16 years since Bhutan became a democracy, citizens have had little understanding of the need to participate in decisions that affect their lives. The Bhutan Center for Media and Democracy (BCMD) has been working towards enhancing civic engagement so that decisions made at all levels include diverse voices.

BCMD promotes an understanding of the individual's role in democracy. They have been building capacity by training teachers in districts Thimpu, Paro, and now Tsirang. In 2023 in the district of Tsirang, 39 teachers trained in Nurturing Student Representation and Asset-Based Community Mapping.

Each of the 39 teachers has begun providing step-down training for student representatives, who participate in hands-on learning about community building and engagement.

Young people practice analyzing the challenges of their community and using the strengths of their community to problem-solve. This strengthens their sense of belonging and responsibility over what was previously seen as only a matter for government representatives.

Every participant at the workshop shared how they view their role beyond the school campus and how they can bring stakeholders together to make all perspectives heard.

A 26-year veteran teacher told us he had just realized, during the training, that he has a role beyond the classroom, for he had only been focused before on his students and their learning.

It is crucial for citizens to know that they have responsibilities beyond their four walls and that they have a say in the matters that affect their daily lives. Coming together and taking part is a right for every person. By working at the community level, BCMD is building a nation that is inclusive and active in its democracy.



# RESTORING A NATIONAL TREASURE:

## Transforming Wangduechoeling Palace

Nestled in the cultural heartland of Bumthang, Wangduechoeling Palace—once the first significant home of the Royal Family and a seat of governance — has now been meticulously restored and transformed into a modern museum. It is poised to become a hub for promoting Bhutan's rich cultural heritage. As the Wangduechoeling Palace Museum and Cultural Center (WPMCC) prepares to welcome visitors, a dedicated and skilled team of professionals has worked tirelessly to bring this ambitious project to life.

The journey of restoring and adapting the Wangduechoeling Palace began with the visionary leadership of Her Majesty the Queen Mother Tseyring Pem Wangchuck. Her Majesty envisioned a space that flourishes with culture and creativity—one that inspires and educates young minds while drawing visitors to enjoy Bhutan's deep-rooted history. In Her Majesty's own words, "The Wangduechoeling Palace will be a hub to celebrate and share our rich heritage, culture, and history; a portal to our past; and a bridge across generations."

Building a museum of this magnitude was a complex endeavor. It could not have been realized without the sustained efforts of countless professionals, supporters, generous donors, and partners—each contributing their time, expertise, and resources. The curatorial team has worked diligently to treat and conserve thousands of artifacts. External experts were brought in to design exhibits that tell a layered and engaging story.

Scaffolding surrounds Wangduechoeling Palace as restoration to the exterior proceeds.







Countless hours have been devoted to accurately capturing the narratives, with text panels carefully translated into Dzongkha under the guidance of a team of Bhutanese historians and scholars.

The Bhutan Foundation wishes to acknowledge and express deep gratitude for the generous support and donations that have fueled this project since 2015. Contributions and support have come in the form of artifacts and funding, each one invaluable to the museum's realization. Recently, the Palace Museum was honored to receive a set of slate carvings gifted by the descendants of the von Schulthess family—the Hoch and Oltramare families—in honor of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo.

As the Palace Museum and Cultural Center nears completion, the team, though exhausted, takes immense pride in their contribution to this legacy. When the doors open, we hope that it will welcome not just visitors, but a new chapter in Bhutan's rich cultural narrative.







## WAYS TO GIVE

With your support, the Bhutan Foundation and our Bhutanese partners can make a larger impact.



SCAN ME

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The Bhutan Foundation is an Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3) organization incorporated in the State of Delaware.

For more information, please contact:  
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The Bhutan Foundation has received a platinum rating from charity watchdog Candid and a four-star score from Charity Navigator. These hold the highest standards for evaluating non-profit organizations and advise supporters like you so that you know every dollar is making the largest possible impact.



# FINANCIAL SUMMARY

## Revenue

78.0%	Contributions and Grants	\$4,288,914
9.1%	In-kind Contributions	\$501,989
11.4%	Government Grants	\$629,342
1.5%	Interest & Miscellaneous Income	\$80,886
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$5,501,131</b>

## Expenses

84.4%	Programs	\$4,547,895
11.0%	Admin/Management	\$593,614
4.6%	Fundraising	\$245,281
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$5,386,790</b>

## Liabilities & Net Assets

2.2%	Liabilities	\$131,615
97.8%	Net Assets	\$5,887,853
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$6,019,468</b>

## Net Assets Breakdown

60.6%	Unrestricted	\$3,568,551
39.4%	Restricted	\$2,319,302
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$5,887,853</b>

\*Audited financial statements for fiscal year 2023



84.4%  
on programs

4.6%  
on fundraising

11.0%  
on admin





# BHUTAN FOUNDATION GRANTS

## Conservation of the Environment

### 100,000 to 200,000

College of Natural Resources, Ugyen Wangchuck Institute of Conservation and Environmental Research, Sherubtse College, Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan  
*National Academies of Sciences Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research Research Grant*

Bhutan Ecological Society  
*Million Tree Project*

### 10,000 to 49,999

Bhutan Ecological Society  
*Sustainable Buildings Initiative, BLISS, and General Support*

Bhutan Tiger Center, Nature Conservation Division  
*Tiger Conservation Program*

Green Bhutan Corporation Ltd  
*Tree Plantation Project*

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Renewable Energy, Department of Disaster Management and Department of Forest and Park Services and Department of Agriculture  
*Conference of Parties 27*

Panbang Youth Cooperative and Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative  
*Sustainable Agriculture*

### 9,999 and below

Department of Energy  
*Aja Ney Solar Electrification Project*

Jomolhari Community  
*Snow Leopard Conservation Community Program*

## Equitable and Sustainable Development

### 300,000+

Ministry of Education, Aims Multimedia Pvt. Ltd, VTOB Lifelong Learning Institute, Athang Institute, UNICEF, PHENSEM Parent Support Group, Draktsho, JNW Super FabLab and CST FabLab  
*Special Education Program*

### 200,000 to 300,000

Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Druk Holding and Investments  
Bhutan – Center for Bits and Atoms Super FabLab Agreements

### 50,000 to 99,999

National Medical Services, Ministry of Health, Bumthang Health Association  
*Improving Health Care Services Delivery and Nomad Health Camp*

### 10,000 to 49,999

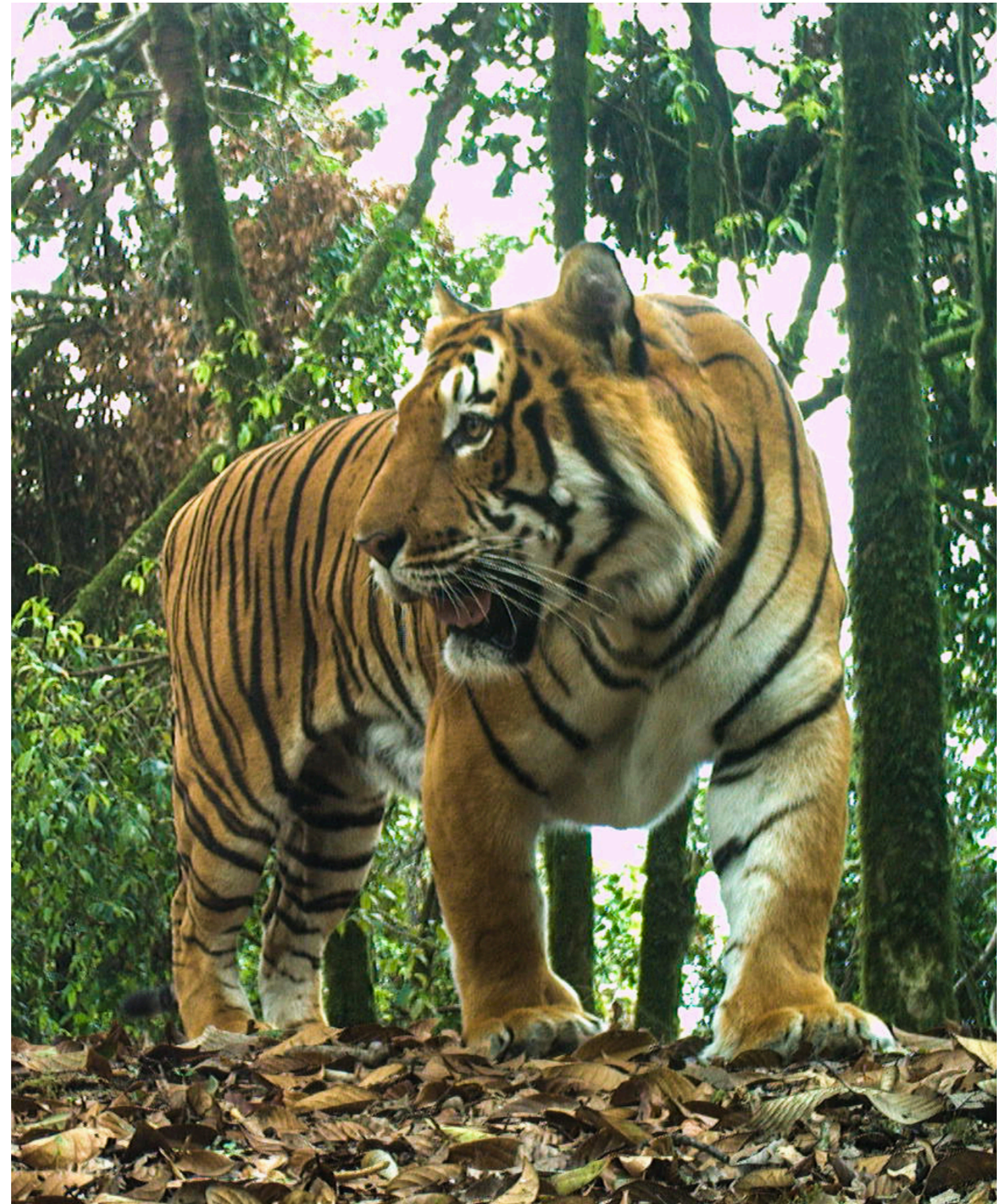
Ministry of Infrastructure and Trade  
*Thimphu Structural Plan*

Ministry of Infrastructure and Trade, Ministry of Education and Skills Development and Ministry of Finance,  
USAID Bhutan Education and Economic Support Activity (BEESA)

National Medical Services, Ministry of Health  
*Support for International Cancer Symposium*

### 9,999 and below

Traditional Medicine Institute  
*Improving Access and Education on Traditional Medicine*





# BHUTAN FOUNDATION GRANTS

## Good Governance

### 300,000+

Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law  
Law Library

### 100,000 to 200,000

YangYa Foundation  
General Support

Youth Development Fund  
General Support, Wellness Center and Nazhoen  
Pelri School

### 50,000 to 99,999

Bhutan Center for Media and Democracy  
Project Mikhung, Citizen Engagement, and  
General Support

Happy Farmers Group, Royal Society for the  
Protection of Nature, Thimphu Tech Park,  
Panbang Organic Farming Group,  
Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative, VAST Bhutan and  
Wangsel Institute for the Deaf  
Small Grants Program

Khedrup Foundation  
General Support

### 10,000 to 49,999

Bhutan Nuns Foundation  
General Support

RENEW (Respect, Educate, Nurture, and  
Empower Women)  
General Support

RSPN (Royal Society for the Protection of  
Nature)  
Conservation projects

Tarayana Foundation  
General Support

### 9,999 and below

Bhutan National Baseball League  
Pitch in for Baseball

Draktsho Vocational Training Centre for  
Special Children and Youth  
General Support

Gyalyum Charitable Trust  
General Support

JANGSA  
Animal Welfare Awareness Program

Loden Foundation  
General Support

Ogyen Choling Foundation  
General Support

Royal Thimphu College  
Scholarship Support

Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative  
Lhomon Education

VAST Bhutan  
General Support

## Preservation of Culture

### 800,000+

Ministry of Home Affairs  
Adaptive Reuse and Restoration of  
Wangduechhoeling Palace Project

### 100,000 to 200,000

Department of Disaster Management &  
Local Governance  
ICS (Incident Command System) Training  
Program

Dratshang Lhentshog  
Conservation of Ancient and Historic  
Buddhist Ethnographic Objects in Thimphu  
and Other Districts

Ministry of Home Affairs  
Documentation of Cultural Heritage Sites

Phajoding Monastery  
English Language Education Program

### 10,000 to 49,999

Eutok Goenzin Dratshang  
General Support

Sewala Buddhist Institute  
General Support

### 9,999 and below

Rangshikhar Gonpa  
Meditation Shelters for Gomchens







## OUR PARTNERS

### Local Partners

Ability Bhutan Society  
 Bhutan Animal Rescue and Care  
 Bhutan Art & Culture Conservation Center  
 Bhutan Baseball & Softball Association  
 Bhutan Cancer Society  
 Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy  
 Bhutan Ecological Society  
 Bhutan for Life  
 Bhutan Institute of Wellbeing  
 Bhutan Nuns Foundation  
 Bhutan Water Partnership  
 Bhutan Yak Federation  
 Bhutan Youth Development Fund  
 Central Monastic Body  
 Dhyana Foundation  
 Disabled Persons' Association of Bhutan  
 Dorje Phagmo Foundation  
 Draktsho Vocational Training Centre for Special Children and Youth  
 Druk Holding and Investments  
 Guengaling Community Cooperatives, Samtse  
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 Panbang Youth Cooperative  
 PHENSEM Parents Support Group, Bhutan  
 Rangshikhar Gonpa  
 Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women

River Guides of Panbang  
 Royal Society for the Protection of Nature  
 Royal University of Bhutan  
 Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative  
 Sewala Buddhist Institute  
 Sherchock Women's Group  
 Tarayana Foundation  
 UNICEF Bhutan  
 Wangsel Institute for the Deaf  
 Water Bhutan  
 Yangya Foundation

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