

CONCEPT PAPER

Contact Information: Ms. Rinchen Wangmo

Conservation and Development Coordinator

Royal Society for Protection of Nature
Post Box 325, Above Rigsum Training Intsitute
Drimen Lam, Thimphu, BHUTAN
Tel: +975-2-322056/326120
Fax: +975-2-323189
Email: rwangmo@rspnbhutan.org

1. Project name: Community-based Sustainable Tourism

2. Project area: Phobjikha

3. Project linkage to national priorities, action plans, and programs:

Bhutan has ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on 25 August 1995¹. The Sustainable Development Agreement with Netherlands and other bilateral and international contracts bind the country to take necessary steps in fulfilling its share in the preservation of biodiversity and the environment. The Integrated Conservation and Development Program (ICDP) concept is based on the Royal Government of Bhutan's policies of *biodiversity conservation*, *rural economic development* and *decentralization*. The 73rd session of the National Assembly (1995) ruled that the country must maintain not less than 60% of its area under forest cover. In its move towards conservation, the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) has established a system of protected areas, which cover 26% of its area. Simultaneously, The RGoB emphasizes the need to enhance the economy of the not only the communities that live within but also those lying on the periphery and outside the protected areas system and calls for public participation in conservation.

4. Project rationale:

Phobjikha is increasingly becoming a favored destination for most tourists and national visitors alike. This has come with the challenge of maintaining and conserving the biodiversity and ecological richness of the valley that is becoming vulnerable to anthropogenic interventions. The valley encompasses one of the biggest habitats for the globally endangered Black-necked Cranes, which is one of the main attractions for visitors. With easy access and relatively light conservation rules and regulations in the area, (as compared to national parks) conserving this

birds and its habitat has become a major challenge for conservation organizations.

In such a scenario, local people play a major role in the future of environment conservation in the area. Therefore integrating community needs with conservation objectives has become crucial for success of conservation. Alternative programs like the community-based sustainable tourism (CBST) offers livelihood choices that is extremely important in the context of current situation where tourism is increasing inevitably in the area.

Economically, local people in Phobjikha still depend heavily on potato cultivation, which generates one time annual income. The national tourism policy characterized by fixed tariffs has failed to bring direct benefit to the local communities. CBST has the potential to bring the benefit directly to people at the grassroots level.

5. Goals and objectives

Goal: Phobjikha valley as a model community-based sustainable tourism destination contributes to conservation of the natural environment, the protection of the crane habitat, conservation of culture, and at the same time contributes to socio-economic benefits for communities in the valley

Objectives:

- 1. Identify potential tourism activities and services and develop Community based sustainable tourism plan (CBST)**
- 2. Build local capacity and awareness on CBST related services and products**
- 3. Develop campsite and enhance existing nature trails**
- 4. Establish coordination between communities and tourism entities and develop marketing linkages**
- 5. Enhancement of the visitors centre.**

6. Expected outcomes:

- 1. Feasible community-based tourism activities and service identified plan developed**
- 2. Increased participation of the local communities in CBST/ecotourism;**
 - 2.1 Improved quality and quantity of local products**
- 3. Existing nature trails improved with development of a view point and installation of interpretations along the existing natural trails.**
 - 3.1 Campsite functioning properly**

4. Potential consumers and stakeholders (tour agencies, local and regional visitors) aware of and responding to the CBST programs in Phobjikha
- 4.1 Nature-based tourism activities organised in villages & community benefiting economically.
5. Viewing facility in place and visitors encroaching the valley reduced
- 5.1 Management of the visitor centre improved
6. Linkage established through exchange visit to Costa Rica.

7. Major results (lessons for sharing)

Building local capacity:

15 local individuals were trained in developing about 11 different types of handicrafts and souvenirs made out of local materials. This training proved successful and generated lot of interest among local people for tourism. Local people are now producing products on their own and RSPN has been helping to market it. It is also expected to create self employment among the community.

Establish coordination with stakeholders

Perhaps one of the major lessons or achievements of this project relates to establishing coordination and linkages with the stakeholder of the project like the Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB). By enhancing coordination with TCB, RSPN has been able to obtain technical support in activities like architectural designing of tourist campsite and viewpoint/resting shed. The designs are now ready for developing the structures. Such coordination mechanisms have not only helped in terms of resource sharing but help avoid duplications and overlaps.

Visitor centre enhancement:

The visitor centre is a hub of tourism activities catering to information and facilities for visitors. Linking other activities like the product development has helped enhance the facility in the centre. Through the product development training for local communities, RSPN has been able to enhance the products in the souvenir shop (within the centre). This will also help sustain the management of the visitor centre in the long run.

Facilities like spotting scope for observing birds like the Black-necked cranes have been installed in the visitor centre. This has attracted more visitors in the centre and helped reduce encroachment in the wetland, an important natural ecosystem in the area (for observing the cranes).

Ecotourism guide

Ecotourism guide for Phobjikha has been developed. The guide gives comprehensive

information on various cultural and nature tourism facilities and services available in the valley. Such a guidebook is very useful in terms of marketing and raising awareness among visitors.

8. Activities for Second Phase:

Sharing knowledge with partners

This will involve travelling to partner countries to share lessons/experience from our project or impart specific project-based knowledge/training (if applicable) for replication by the partner.

9. Stakeholders involved in the project:

Local communities, local Ecotourism committee (sub-committee of local community group-PEMC), Tourism Council of Bhutan, Association of Tour Operators of Bhutan, District Administration.

10. Information on project proposer:

The Royal Society for Protection of Nature, founded in 1987 is the only environmental NGO in Bhutan. With the initial purpose to monitor the endangered bird Black-necked Cranes, RSPN's institutional growth has resulted in widely diversified conservation programs. The organization now engages extensively in promoting sustainable livelihoods, ecosystem and endangered species conservation, environmental education and advocacy. RSPN also maintains flexibility in responding to emerging environmental issues in Bhutan. Governed by 9 board of directors, the organization is equipped with 22 national staff, including, researchers, educators, project managers and other support staff.

11. Estimated budget :

TOTAL: US\$ 30,000

Annex 2

Information on Project Proposer:

Background of RSPN

The Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN) is the first and the only non-governmental organization (NGO) in the Kingdom to exclusively concern itself with the conservation of Bhutan's environment. Although RSPN was established in 1987, it was only on 29 October 1997 that it was accorded legal status as a non-profit NGO. Since then the Society has acquired *Institutional Support and Capacity Development* funding from the Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation (BTF) until the year 2003. As a Non Governmental Organization (NGO), RSPN relies upon the support of its members, and donor agencies, to enable it to carry out its programs. The Society was given a major boost when His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince consented to become the Royal Patron of the RSPN. The management has also been strengthened with a fully functioning eleven-member Board of Directors while its day to day

operations, administration, conservation and education programs are managed through its four sub units comprising of a team of twelve paid staff.

RSPN is a member driven organization, with over 3,321 members who primarily consist of students, trainees and professionals. Members are affiliated to RSPN either through their active involvement in RSPN “*Nature Clubs*” (at present there are 63 nature clubs), which function within institutions such as schools, training institutes and colleges, or through “*support groups*” (247 at present), which function at the district level and are more involved with community participation in conservation activities. In some districts these two groups work together to bridge the gap in collaborative efforts between communities, institutions and Government.

At inception, RSPN was involved in counting and monitoring the rare and endangered black necked cranes which winter in several valleys of Bhutan. However, over the years, the Society’s organizational capacity has increased and it has broadened its conservation efforts. RSPN’s conservation strategies include awareness building, environmental education and promoting alternatives to solve environmental problems. RSPN has also supplemented the Royal Government’s efforts to initiate awareness programs within Parks and in both formal and non-formal education sectors.

RSPN’s Mission

RSPN is an organization that will lead by example and being a citizen based organization, it will work toward involving the people both individually and collectively in the conservation of the Kingdom's environmental heritage. The organization also envisages becoming a lead provider of information on the environment of Bhutan. This will be augmented through conduct of applied research in selected areas. RSPN will not operate in isolation but will work in partnership with relevant institutions and social groups ranging from government agencies to student clubs.

Mission Statement

RSPN's mission is “*to inspire personal responsibility and actively involve the people of Bhutan in the conservation of the Kingdom's environment* through education, applied research and information dissemination; and collaboration with concerned agencies and indigenous institutions*”.

RSPN's goals are to:

- § Become a catalyst in promoting positive attitudes and self-sustaining citizens' action to conserve Bhutan's rich environmental heritage.
- § Become an efficient, effective and financially self-reliant conservation organization.
- § Become a major resource for information on Bhutan's environment.

Objectives.

Goal 1 Become a catalyst in promoting positive attitudes and self-sustaining citizens' action to conserve Bhutan's rich environmental heritage.

The following programmatic objectives support this goal:

- § Establish self-sustaining Nature Clubs in 50% of the Kingdom's schools.
- § Establish pilot religion and environment program.
- § Establish in-house environmental education training programs in all training Institutions.
- § Establish model ICDP in Black Necked Crane habitats.
- § Establish model self-sustaining citizen involvement program for urban solid waste management.

Goal 2 Become an efficient, effective and financially self-reliant conservation organization.

The following organizational objectives support this goal:

- § Establish dynamic and effective management and governance.
- § Obtain at least three thousand (3,000) members by 2004.
- § Create at least a One million dollar (\$1,000,000) reserve by 2004.

Goal 3 Become a major resource for information on Bhutan's environment.

The following institutional development objectives support this goal:

- § Develop resource center for information on Bhutan's environment.
- § Create forum for discussion on environmental issues.
- § Establish national database for avifauna.

