

# Community-based Ecotourism

A feasibility assessment in White-bellied Heron habitats along Punatsangchhu and Mangdechhu basins, Bhutan



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Developing Ecosystem-based Solutions for Managing Biodiversity Landscapes in Bhutan

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**Prepared by:**

EcoCall Consultancy Services &  
Athang Training Academy

**Reviewers - Royal Society for Protection of Nature:**

Lungten Norbu, PhD  
Norbu Wangdi, PhD  
Tsheten Dorji  
Khachi Wangmo  
Karma Wangchuk

**Project co-ordination:**

Norbu Wangdi, PhD

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**Layout and design:**

Sonam Rinzin

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## Executive summary

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The Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN) through its project titled '*Developing ecosystem-based solutions for managing biodiversity landscapes in Bhutan*' aims to develop ecosystem-based solutions for managing biodiversity landscapes. The project is funded by the Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), Germany through International Climate Initiative (IKI) with co-funding from MAVA Foundation, Switzerland. The major focus is on establishing approaches and tools for protecting and managing White-bellied Heron habitats along Punatsangchhu and Mangdechhu basins in Bhutan. The project also aims to design and apply community engagement strategies for WBH conservation through diversification of livelihood options and promotion of an environmentally conducive livelihood approach, which will strengthen the community's resilience to climate change in the long run. In line with the aims of the project, this study examines the feasibility of promoting Community-based ecotourism (CBET) in the six dzongkhags of Punakha, Dagana, Tsirang, Trongsa, Wangdue Phodrang and Zhemgang.

It is observed that the WBH habitats are shrinking at an exponential rate and the river habitats are transforming at an alarming pace. Many areas where the WBH was seen have reported no sightings during recent surveys. The population of WBH has drastically reduced almost to the brink of extinction. Securing its survival has become critical. The major threats and disturbances are caused by anthropogenic activities.

The study findings recommend that CBET cannot be taken as a panacea to save the WBH. In fact a cautious approach needs to be applied with minimal disturbance to ensure the survival of the WBH. This would mean focussing on the restoration of the habitats as a precondition to developing CBET. The report is presented in three parts.

**Part 1** – Setting the context with two sections. Section 1: Introducing CBET and its opportunities for people and nature. Section 2: Promoting the conservation of WBH through CBET.

**Part 2** – Study findings with section 3 looking at the feasibility of CBET in the WBH sites. Presenting the situation in all the six dzongkhags and conducting an analysis of the overall findings.

**Part 3** – Way forward with recommendations.

# PART - 1

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## Setting the Context

## Section 1. Community-based Ecotourism: opportunities for people and nature

### 1.1 International context

Tourism is one of the world's largest and fastest-growing industries. It is also one of the most diverse sectors providing a major source of foreign exchange earners and creator of employment opportunities. It offers diverse opportunities and immense benefits for economic and social development that incentivizes environmental and cultural protection. It is a sector where both the developed and developing countries engage, and believe in the significance of its promotion to complement the national development objectives. The promising prospects of the travel and tourism industry continue to push towards its expansion and diversification with the emergence of new destinations in addition to the existing ones. The increased diversity in traveller interests has led to the emergence of several forms of tourism. There is a significant shift in travellers' interest in nature and cultural activities. Travellers are becoming more conscious of their carbon footprint. This is having an influence on both the travellers and the host destination, as the latter seeks to create products and activities that are less harmful to the cultural and natural environment. Tourism sustainability is increasingly becoming a concern for many countries. This has led to many countries becoming more conscious and concerned to promote forms of tourism that involve social responsibility, a strong commitment to nature and the integration of local people in tourism development. In the process, sustainable forms of tourism like ecotourism have been regarded by many countries as the best form of tourism to support and enhance their sustainable development aspirations.

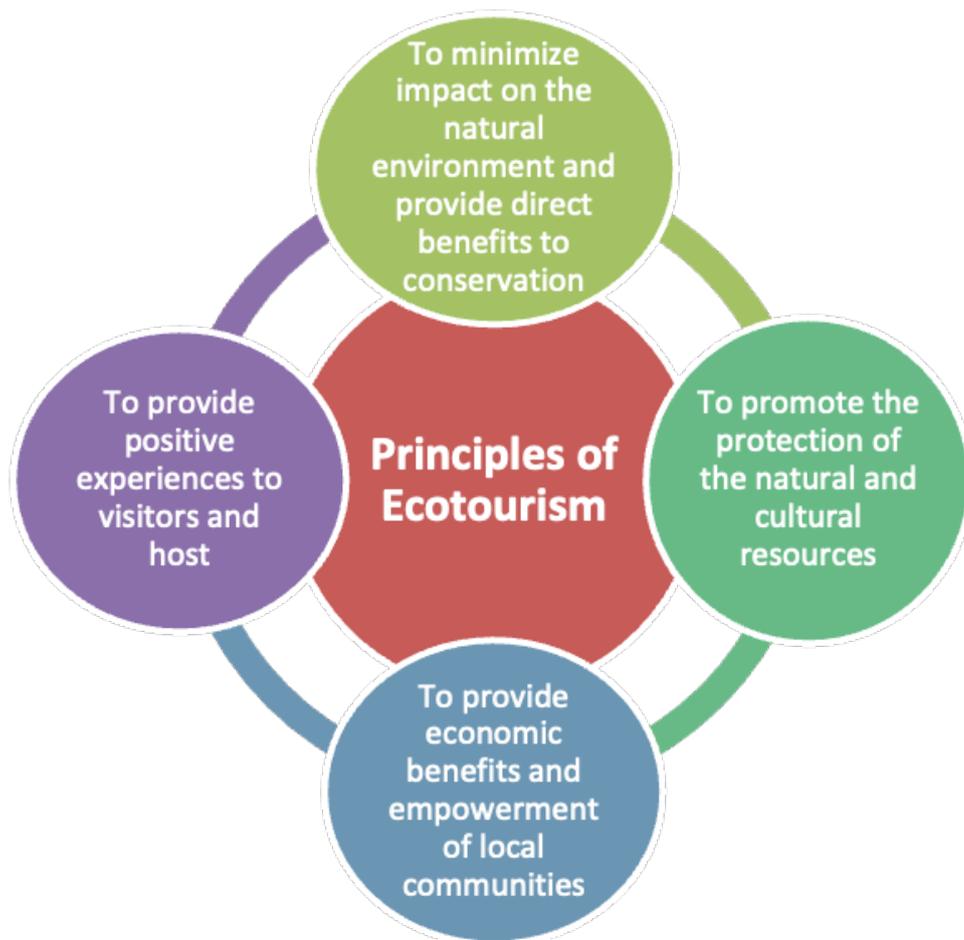
The term ecotourism was conceptualized in the early 1980s. Hector Ceballos-Lascurain, a Mexican architect and Environmentalist is considered as the father of ecotourism. The evolution of ecotourism was mainly due to traveler recognition of the links between conservation, communities and tourism. It came from nature tourism, as tourists felt the desire to integrate host communities and their culture. Protected Area Management changed its conservation approach from focusing only on nature, to incentivizing the engagement and support of host communities. Ecotourism was seen as a viable option to adapt to this change. Since its inception, there have been many definitions of ecotourism. The most commonly accepted definition was established by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) in 1990 as:

*Responsible for travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improve the well-being of local people.*

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) describes ecotourism as:

*Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promote conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local people.*

While there are many definitions to interpret ecotourism, it basically revolves around minimizing negative impacts on the existing cultural and natural landscape while maximizing economic benefits for the host communities. The fundamental principles of ecotourism are shown below in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: Principles of Ecotourism*

In adherence to the key principles of ecotourism, the term 'community-based ecotourism' puts further emphasis on this social dimension whereby the host local community has substantial control over, and involvement in its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, when we use the term community-based ecotourism it basically means that the local communities are empowered to be actively involved in its planning and management. As ecotourism is implemented in areas with the presence of local people it is only logical that they are not only actively engaged but also have control of its management. Hence, empowerment of local communities is critical for promoting community-based ecotourism. This is aptly explained by Scheyvens under table 1 in a framework demonstrating the different forms of empowerment – economic, psychological, social, and political.

<sup>1</sup> Guidelines for community-based ecotourism development, WWF International, 2001

|                                  | Signs of empowerment   | Signs of disempowerment  |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Economic empowerment</b>      | Ecotourism brings lasting economic gains to a local community. Cash earned is shared between many households in the community. There are visible signs of improvements from the cash that is earned (e.g., improved water systems, houses made of more permanent materials).   | Ecotourism merely results in small, spasmodic cash gains for a local community. Most profits go to local elites, outside operators, government agencies, etc. Only a few individuals or families gain direct financial benefits from ecotourism, while others cannot find a way to share in these economic benefits because they lack capital and/or appropriate skills.   |
| <b>Psychological empowerment</b> | Self-esteem of many community members is enhanced because of outside recognition of the uniqueness and value of their culture, their natural resources and their traditional knowledge. Increasing confidence of community members leads them to seek out further education and training opportunities. Access to employment and cash leads to an increase in status for traditionally low-status sectors of society e.g., women, youths.  | Many people have not shared in the benefits of ecotourism, yet they may face hardships because of reduced access to the resources of a protected area. They are thus confused, frustrated, disinterested or disillusioned with the initiative.   |
| <b>Social empowerment</b>        | Ecotourism maintains or enhances the local community's equilibrium. Community cohesion is improved as individuals and families work together to build a successful ecotourism venture. Some funds raised are used for community development purposes, e.g., to build schools or improve roads.   | Disharmony and social decay. Many in the community take on outside values and lose respect for traditional culture and for elders. Disadvantaged groups (e.g., women) bear the brunt of problems associated with the ecotourism initiative and fail to share equitably in its benefits. Rather than cooperating, individuals, families, ethnic or socio-economic groups compete with each other for the perceived benefits of ecotourism. Resentment and jealousy are commonplace. |
| <b>Political empowerment</b>     | The community's political structure, which fairly represents the needs and interests of all community groups, provides a forum through which people can raise questions relating to the ecotourism venture and have their concerns dealt with. Agencies initiating or implementing the ecotourism venture seek out the opinions of community groups (including special interest groups of women, youths and other socially disadvantaged groups) and provide opportunities for them to be represented on decision-making bodies e.g., the Wildlife Park Board. | The community has an autocratic and/or self-interested leadership. Agencies initiating or implementing the ecotourism venture treat communities as passive beneficiaries, failing to involve them in decision-making. Thus, the majority of community members feel they have little or no say over <i>whether</i> the ecotourism initiative operates or <i>the way</i> in which it operates.   |

**Table 1:** Framework for determining the impacts of ecotourism initiatives on local communities<sup>2</sup>

The trend in travel too is evolving, from 'site-seeing' to 'site-doing' wherein visitors take an active role in more immersive experiences. These experiences would include activities such as engaging with rural communities, participating in their daily lives, and immersion in the natural environment. The increasing interest in travellers for community-based ecotourism stimulates and incentivizes

<sup>2</sup> Regina Scheyvens. Ecotourism and the empowerment of local communities

the local communities to engage in them becoming active custodians of the natural environment. Creating this linkage between biodiversity conservation and the well-being of local communities can lead to a win-win situation for nature and people. Acknowledging the benefits of community-based ecotourism it is being embraced by many countries as one of the most viable forms of tourism to support sustainable development.

## 1.2 National context

Tourism development in Bhutan since its inception in 1974 has emerged as a promising future for the country. Its attractions revolve around its two main areas i.e., the unique and vibrant culture, and nature with its rich biodiversity. Recognizing the benefits of tourism but at the same time apprehensive over its adverse impacts a cautious approach towards its development has been pursued based on the concept of "high value low volume". This cautious policy has helped generate much needed revenue while shielding the country from the detrimental impacts. Although the concept of ecotourism emerged only sometime in the early 1980s, the tourism policy that Bhutan pursued was very much in line with the principles of ecotourism. This only demonstrates that Bhutan with its enlightened leadership of the 4<sup>th</sup> King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck was ahead in visionary thinking. The tourism policy based on ecotourism principles is in accordance with His Majesty's development philosophy of Gross National Happiness.

### Ecotourism in the Bhutan Context<sup>3</sup>

Considering that the principles of ecotourism and Bhutan's development vision of Gross National Happiness have many similarities, ecotourism in the Bhutan context is defined as follows:

*"High value low impact travel that supports the protection of cultural and natural heritage; provides positive and enriching experiences for visitors and hosts; assures tangible benefits to local people, and contributes to the pillars of Gross National Happiness."*

Therefore, ecotourism development in Bhutan must take into consideration the following key elements:

- » **High value low impact:** High value in terms of - revenue generation, uniqueness and authenticity of the experience, and standards and services. Low impact in regards to minimizing negative socio-cultural and environmental impacts;
- » **Protection of natural and cultural heritage:** It should contribute to safeguarding and promoting the upkeep of the cultural and natural heritage;
- » **Assuring tangible benefits to communities:** empowering communities through capacity building to participate as partners in ecotourism, enabling them to derive direct social and economic benefits to stimulate their interest in their participation;
- » **Providing an educational and Quality experience for visitors and hosts:** Education and awareness is an important component. Visitors benefit from authentic and enriching experiences while hosts derive positive learning experiences.
- » **Contributing to the goals of Gross national Happiness:** All activities through ecotourism should contribute towards strengthening the pillars of Gross National Happiness.

<sup>3</sup> Ecotourism development in the protected areas network of Bhutan. Guidelines for planning and management. Department of Forests & Park Services and Tourism Council of Bhutan. 2012.

Bhutan with a forest cover of over 72% of the geographical size of the country and an extensive network of protected areas system covering over 51% of the country offers Bhutan a perfect opportunity to develop ecotourism. The presence of several rare and endangered species of flora and fauna within a cultural landscape of largely rural inhabitants makes Bhutan a haven for developing community-based ecotourism. One example is bird-watching tours in Bhutan. The country has several areas in Bhutan which are considered some of the best bird-watching spots in Asia. Therefore, the scope and prospects for promoting ecotourism remain promising for Bhutan. Its development has the potential to complement some of the significant development aspirations of the country. These are elaborated below.

***Ecotourism for GNH and its correlation:*** The overarching national development philosophy is based on the vision of Gross National Happiness (GNH). This vision is founded on the four pillars of promoting Environmental Conservation, preservation of the cultural heritage, equitable socio-economic development, and good governance. These pillars bear strong affinity and correlation to the principles of Ecotourism. The development of ecotourism contributes to securing and effectuating the vision of GNH.

***Ecotourism For the forests and protected areas:*** The enormous natural endowment of the country consisting of over 72% forest cover and an extensive network of protected areas covering over 51% makes Bhutan one of the top countries in terms of biodiversity conservation. While this provides a safe haven to harbor many species of flora and fauna in a developing country it can lead to adverse impacts on the natural environment. Ecotourism has the potential to bring about a balance in conservation and development and promote sustainable development.

***Ecotourism for upholding the Carbon negative image of the country:*** Globally nations are being threatened with climate change due to increased emissions and deforestation leading to declining absorption capacity of carbon. Bhutan with its extensive forest cover has been recognized as one of the only carbon negative places. Development through Ecotourism offers one of the best options to continue supporting Bhutan to remain a carbon negative country through low carbon tours.

***Support to local communities:*** The major population of Bhutan comprises the rural community practicing subsistence agriculture as the predominant occupation. The extensive forest cover harbouring several wildlife species weighs heavily on the people's livelihood. Human-wildlife conflict is a serious concern. Ecotourism incentivizes and offers the opportunity to compensate and supplement their livelihood. Through the direct and indirect benefits, it helps the community recognize wildlife conservation as an economic opportunity as opposed to being a threat to their livelihood.

Considering the situation in Bhutan with its rich natural and cultural heritage, the scope for the development of ecotourism is promising. However, its development is still at its nascent stage. As such, initiatives undertaken by the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature can lead to enhancing the development of ecotourism in securing opportunities for people and nature.

## Section 2: Promoting the conservation of WBH through CBET

### 2.1 Global status

White-bellied Heron (*Ardea insignis*) is the world's second-largest Heron and is categorized as critically endangered on IUCN species red list (IUCN 2008). It is the rarest heron in the world and among the 50 rarest bird species on earth. The White-bellied heron (WBH) inhabits the freshwater ecosystems of the eastern Himalayas including the wetlands and subtropical forests in the foothills. The population of WBH has drastically reduced almost to the brink of extinction. Securing its survival has become critical. In 2015 it has been confirmed that there are only 60 individuals distributed among four range countries of India, Myanmar, Bhutan and China.

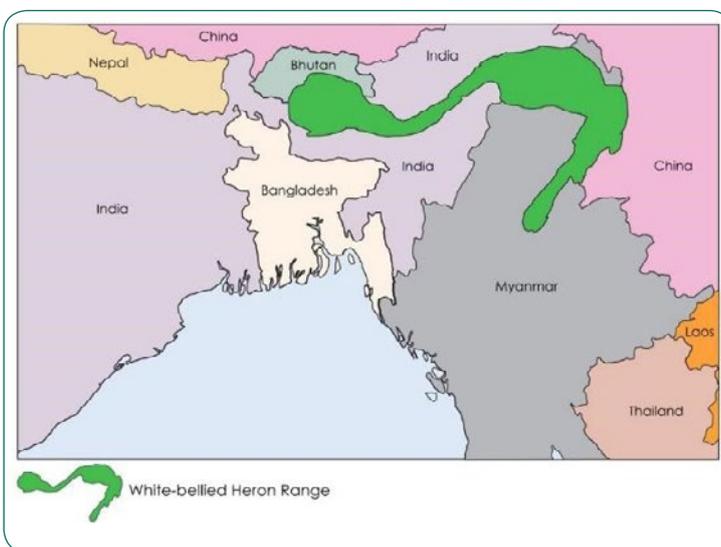


Figure 2: Global range and population of WBH (2015)



Globally the threats faced by the WBH are habitat loss, degradation and disturbance due to human activities. It has become extinct in Nepal and possibly in Bangladesh.

### 2.2 Status of WBH in Bhutan

Among the countries with WBH, Bhutan has the maximum population and probably offers the best chance for its survival. The 2015 census reports 28 individuals in Bhutan (refer to figure 1). However, the records of the annual population surveys conducted from 27 February to 03 March 2021 recorded only 22 WBHs in the country. The survey confirmed 19 adults and three sub-adult individuals (RSPN annual population survey 2021). This was five less from the previous year's count. Considering the annual decline in numbers their existence in Bhutan too is in a precarious situation. WBHs are found mainly along the two river basins of Punatsangchhu and Mangdechhu basin. Figure 3 shows the areas that have been surveyed in Bhutan with the presence of WBH.

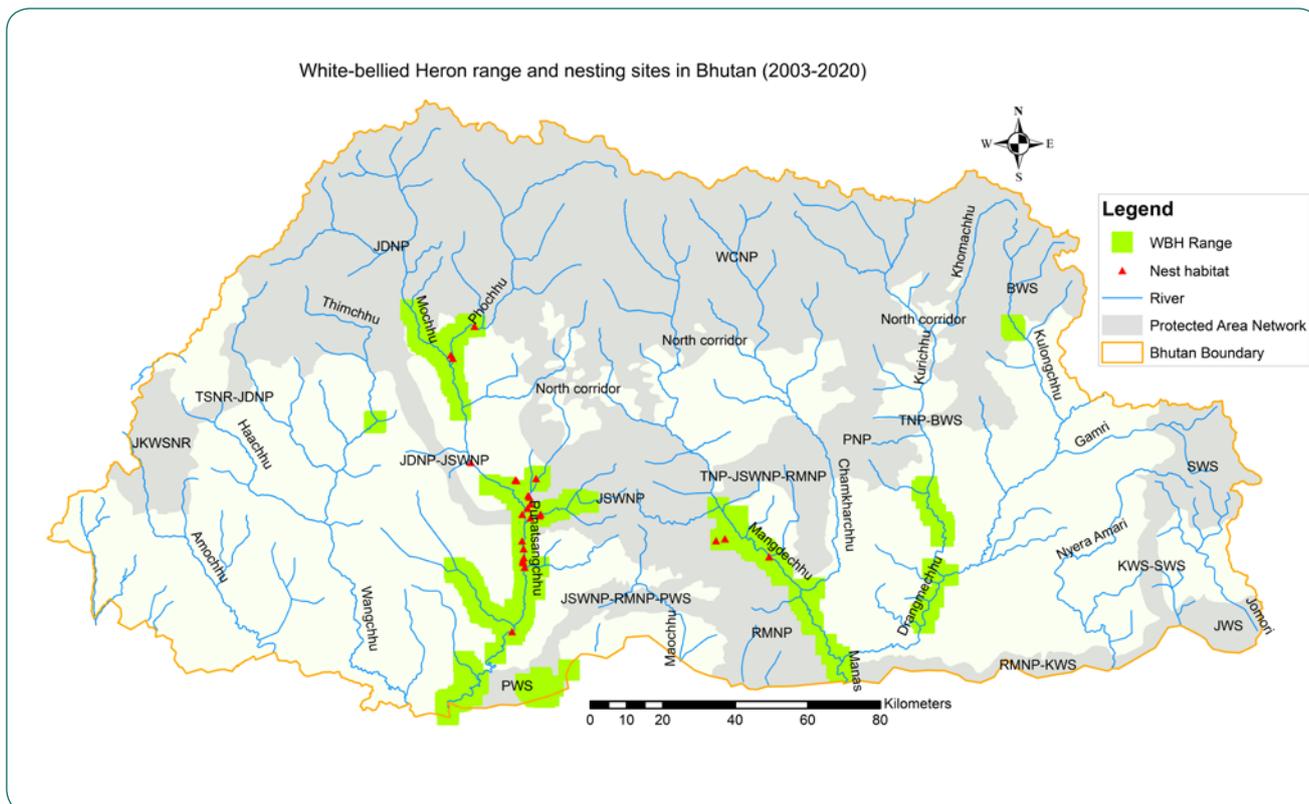


Figure 3: WBH population and nest distribution in Bhutan (WBH conservation center plan, RSPN)

The rapid socio-economic development in the country has come at a cost of fragmenting and disturbing habitats harbouring many of the wildlife species. Likewise, the threats to WBH have been caused by development and other anthropogenic activities. A list of threats it faces along the two river basins of Punatsangchhu and Mangdechhu is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Threats to WBH in Bhutan (WBH conservation center plan, RSPN)

| River Basin                | Threats   |   |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Punatsangchhu basin</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illegal fishing</li> <li>• Cattle grazing</li> <li>• Firewood collection</li> <li>• Picnic spot</li> <li>• Rafting</li> <li>• Forest fires</li> <li>• Camping spot</li> <li>• Road construction</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spiritual site</li> <li>• Agricultural land</li> <li>• Cattle shed</li> <li>• Trekking route</li> <li>• Electricity transmission lines</li> <li>• Sand extraction</li> <li>• Stone extraction</li> </ul> |
| <b>Mangdechhu basin</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cattle grazing/Cow shed</li> <li>• Sand quarry</li> <li>• Electricity transmission lines</li> <li>• Car washing</li> <li>• Road construction</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permitted fishing</li> <li>• Illegal fishing</li> <li>• Picnic spot</li> <li>• Cattle grazing</li> <li>• Forest fires</li> </ul>   |

Table 3: Overall threat ranking<sup>4</sup>

| Threat category                          |                 | Specific threats within a threat category |                      |                           |            |
|--|-----------------|---|----------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| Fishing                                  | Fishing         |   |                      |                           |            |
| Natural Resource extraction (Commercial) | Sand extraction | Stone quarry                              |                      |                           |            |
| Hydropower development                   | Dam             | Water Diversion                           | Power line           | Hydropower infrastructure |            |
| Infrastructure Development               | Road            | Bridge                                    | Building             | Construction work         |            |
| Tourism and Recreation                   | Rafting         | Camping                                   | Picnicking           | Trekking                  |            |
| Local communities                        | Cattle Grazing  | NWFPs collection                          | Driftwood collection | Firewood logging          | Water pump |
| Others                                   | Waste pollution | Deforestation                             | Forest Fire Forest   | Forest Degradation        |            |
| Color coding legend                      |                 | Very High                                 | High                 | Medium                    | Low        |

Concerned about the declining numbers of the WBH, RSPN has been actively engaged in working towards interventions to protect the WBH. Research works including data collection and monitoring of nesting sites has been ongoing. One major intervention has been the establishment of the WBH Conservation Center located at Chachey Dovan, Tsirang in an area size of 18.224 acres. The development of community-based ecotourism is another opportunity that is being explored to engage the local communities living within the WBH habitat.



Figure 4: WBH conservation Center located at Chachey, Tsirang (WBH conservation center plan, RSPN)

4 Mapping and quantifying multiple threats to the critically endangered WBH and its habitat in Bhutan. Lungten and Thinley Phuntscho. 2021



**Figure 5:** Layout of the WBH Conservation Center

# PART - 2

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## Study Findings

### Section 3. Feasibility for CBET in the WBH sites

The habitat of the WBH along the river basins of Punatsangchu and Mangdechhu encompasses the areas within the six dzongkhags of Punakha, Wangduephodrang, Tsirang, Dagana, Trongsa and Zhemgang shown in Figure 6. The feasibility study is presented for each of the six dzongkhags.

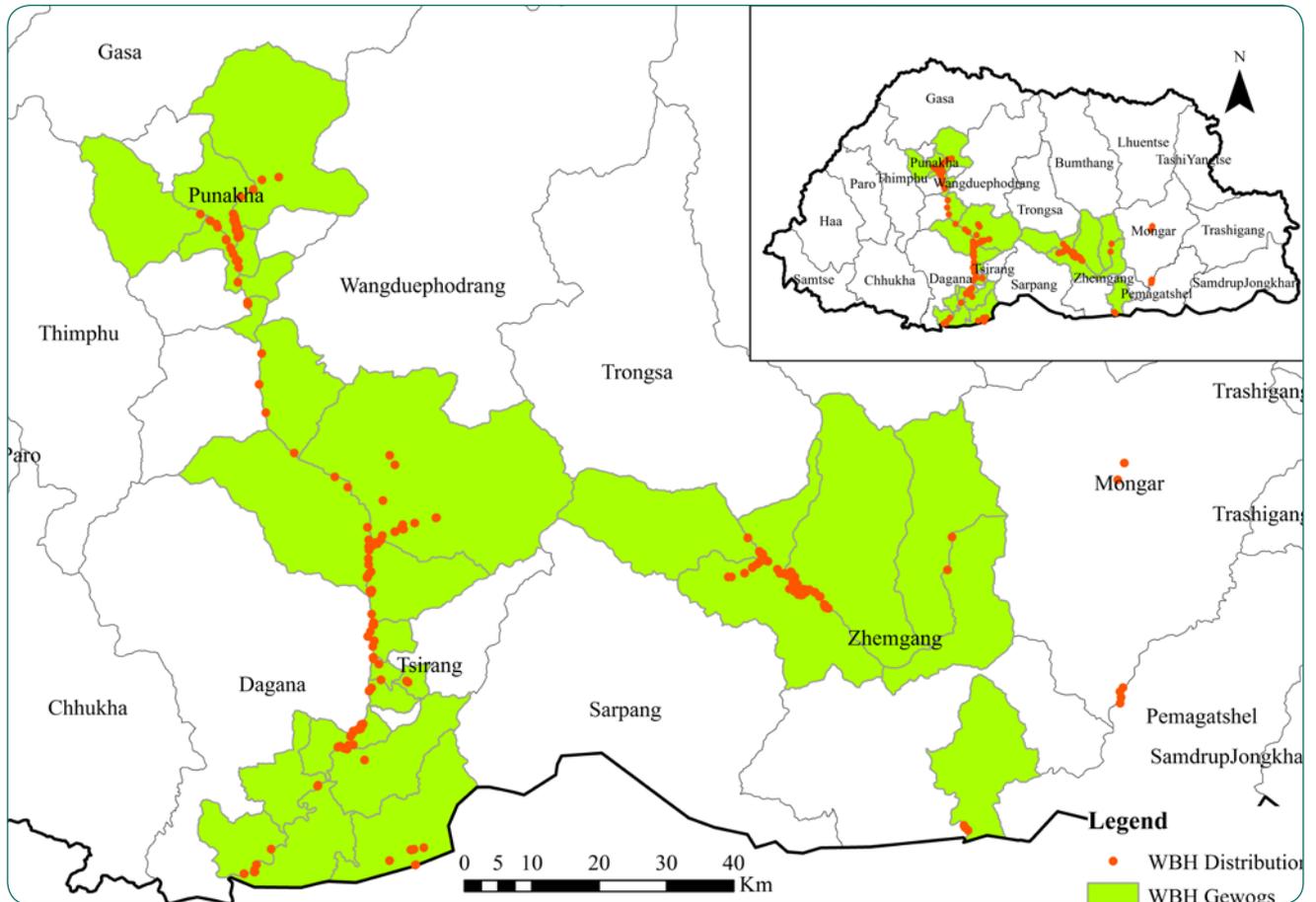


Figure 6: WBH habitat within the six dzongkhags

# 1. Punakha Dzongkhag

## 1.1 Dzongkhag background

Punakha dzongkhag is located in the western part of Bhutan surrounded by the dzongkhags of Thimphu, Gasa, and Wangduephodrang. The dzongkhag is administratively divided into eleven gewogs. The altitudinal range from 1100 – 2500 meters offers warm climatic conditions making it favourable for agriculture. The main crops grown are rice, wheat, maize and mustard. Several varieties of fruits and vegetables are grown and supplement the villagers with economic benefits. The population of the Dzongkhag stands at 29,557 as per 2019 census records.

## 1.2 Status of the White-bellied Heron along the habitats in Punakha

It is reported that the WBH used to be found in the 9 gewogs of – Goenshari, Chhubu, Kabjisa, Toedwang, Guma, Dzomi, Lingmukha, Talo, and Barp. Surveys during 2007 and 2008 recorded 8 of them along the Phochhu and Mochhu offering the best sightings. Unfortunately, over the years, there has been a decline in the numbers in Punakha. Recent meetings with the communities and forestry officials have indicated that no birds have been seen since 2020. Unregulated rafting along the two rivers is believed to be the major disturbance to the birds. This was raised as a major threat during all the community meetings. Further during the first democratic government, a stretch of river along the phochhu was declared as Heron sanctuary to curb the disturbance caused due to sand and stone collection. Unfortunately, this order has not been implemented on the ground. In the process, due to the disturbances to the habitat, the number of herons has been gradually decreasing in Punakha with no sightings reported from 2020.

## 1.3 Tourism in Punakha

The proximity to the capital city and the international airport makes Punakha a popular tourist destination. Punakha offers a diversity of attractions which are cultural and nature-based. These include hiking trails, visiting lakes, river rafting, bird watching, hot springs, biking trails, cultural sites, and events.

### 1.3.1 Tourism arrival record

Punakha has been one of the popular tourism destinations and statistically, it has constantly been the third highest tourist visited Dzongkhag next to Paro and Thimphu. Rudimentary data collected from the Tourism Council of Bhutan shows the steady rise in the number of bed-nights that tourists are spending in Punakha. From a total of 18,697 bed-nights in 2011, the number of bed-nights had risen to 77,443 in 2019.

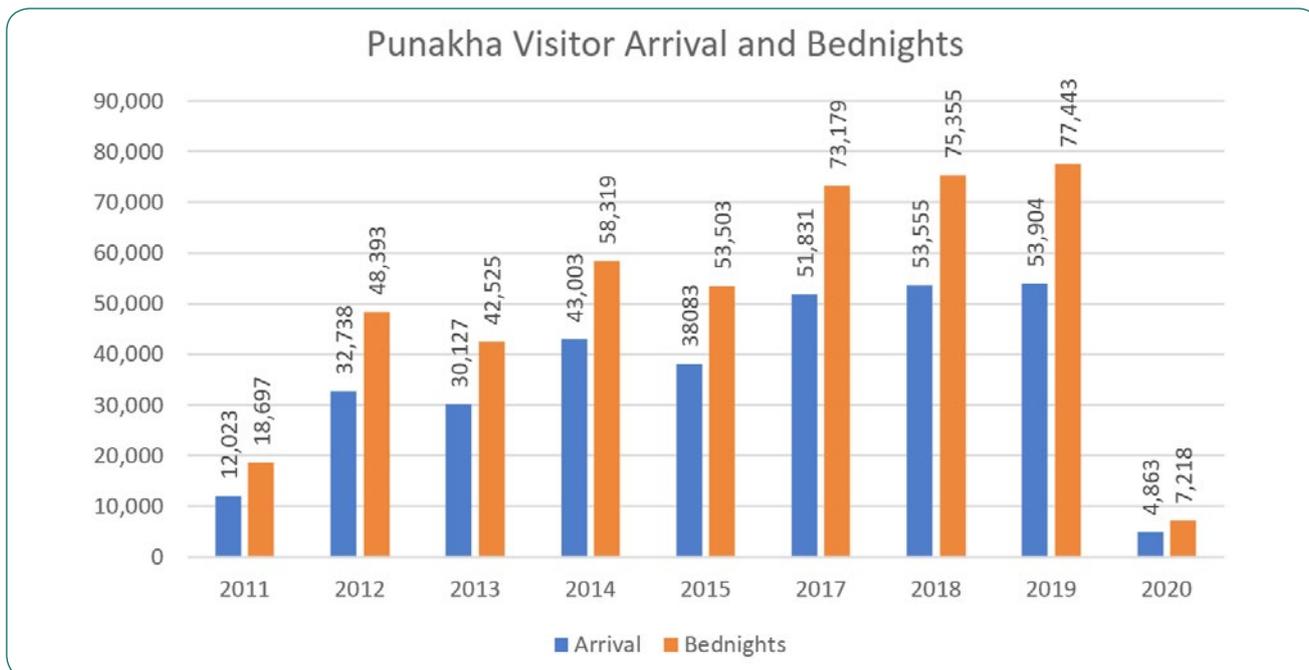


Figure 7: Tourism arrival and bednights record in Punakha

Their rise in the number of visitors until the year 2019 is very notable. In fact, the tourism growth in the dzongkhags have been one of the key influences of developmental and landscape changes in the Punakha and nearby valley. There is no reference to how tourism has directly benefited the local people, but according to the TCB, the average total revenue of the tourism establishments in the Punakha Dzongkhag is Nu.319.66 million from tourists.

### 1.3.2 Tourism amenities in the Dzongkhag

| Amenities                              | Total | Remarks  |
|--|-------|--|
| <b>Accommodation</b>                   |       |  |
| TCB certified Hotel-3 star             | 12    |  |
| TCB certified Hotel-4 star             | 3     |  |
| TCB certified Hotel-5 star             | 3     |  |
| Non-TCB certified Hotel                | 29    |  |
| Village Home Stays                     | 17    |  |
| Campground/campsite (with cottage)     | 2     |  |
| Other-Paying Guest House and Apartment | 1     |  |
| <b>Food</b>                            |       |  |
| Restaurant                             | 51    |  |
| Coffee Shop/Cafeteria                  | 1     |  |
| <b>Entertainment</b>                   | 9     | Karaoke/ Drayang   |
| <b>Public Restrooms</b>                | 6     | Chimi Lhakhang, Khamsum Yuley Namgyal Chorten, Sangchen Dorji Lhuendrupcholing Nunnery in Walakha, Rimchu, Jecchulum, Menchuna |

Source: Tourism Establishment Census of Bhutan 2021 and TRI

### 1.3.3 Popular tourism activities in Punakha

| Activities                  | Remarks   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Birdwatching</b>         | There are many birding sites, some of the popular sites are along the riversides.   |
| <b>Camping</b>              | Punakha is popular for riverside camping. There are also few unregistered and unmanaged campsites along the riversides.   |
| <b>Picnicking</b>           | The pleasant climate, landscape and the short distance of Punakha from the capital attracts many of the Bhutanese during the weekend and holidays for day trip picnics or camping.  |
| <b>Pilgrimage</b>           | There are many sacred places within and around the Dzongkhag. Some of the sacred sites are associated with Lama Drukpa Kuenley (the Divine Madman), Druptop Ngagi Rinchen, 9 <sup>th</sup> Je Shacha Rinchen.   |
| <b>Rafting and Kayaking</b> | Both the Phochhu and Mochhu rivers have been immensely used for Rafting and Kayaking. Kayaking is mostly preferred along the Phochhu river. Although it is one of the popular tourism activities in Punakha, concerns have been raised about this being one of the causes of disturbances to the WBH habitat. |
| <b>Trekking</b>             | Here are trails that connect different villages and cultural/ natural sites within and outside the Dzongkhag. Few of the popular treks are the Punakha Winter Trek, Samtengang Trek.  |

### 1.3.4 Places to visit

Punakha is inextricably linked to some of the most significant and momentous events in Bhutan history. It was where the dual system of governance was formed by the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal; the First King was enthroned; The First National Assembly was convened; became the first capital of the nation; and the winter residence of the Zhung Dratshang. Punakha also has many cultural sites and natural landmarks that constitute some of the most significant treasures of the country. Following are the lists of some of the landmarks:

| Sl. No              | Cultural and Natural sites | Accessibility                           | Details   |
|---------------------|----------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Baap Gewog</b>   |                            |   |   |
| 1.                  | Chimi Lhakhang             | Accessible by road                      | Dedicated to Drukpa Kunley known as the Divine Madman. The temple has phallus symbols strewn everywhere on the walls of the temple. Popularly known to bless people who wish and pray for having children.  |
| 2.                  | Nalanda Monastery          | Accessible by road                      | Built in the 17 <sup>th</sup> century by the 9 <sup>th</sup> Je Shacha Rinchen. It is one of the oldest monastic schools. The temple is believed to represent Nalanda in India.   |
| <b>Chhubu Gewog</b> |                            |   |   |
| 3.                  | Sewala Gompa               | About 4 to 5 hours walk from road point | It is the main seat of the successive Jamgoens. Uphill from Changyul near Punakha Dzong. This is one of the monastic institutions in the country and has produced most of the Je Khenpos (Spiritual Heads) of Bhutan. It makes a great place for a day hike while in Punakha. |

|                        |   |  |  |
|------------------------|---|--|--|
| 4.                     | Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten                                  | Accessible by road, about 600 metres uphill walk from the Khamsum Nyenzergang Chorten at Yusakha village | The Khamsum Yulley chorten is one of the most popular Punakha tourist places. The Lhakhang complex also serves as a fine example of the architectural traditions of the country. The enormous statue of Vajrakilaya, the easily angered Buddhist god, is the first thing that you see when you walk into the Lhakhang.   |
| 5.                     | Sona Gasa/ Do Jagar Lam Lhakhang                                | Accessible by road, about 3.8 km road distance from the Punakha Dzong                                    | Also known as Do Jagar Lam Lhakhang. One of the main relics of the Lhakhang is a rock with a crack in the middle with Buddhist inscriptions. Associated with a Bengali Tantric Master, Drupthop Ngagi Rinchen who is supposedly have sent lightning and hail to split the rock in half to liberate his mother's soul trapped inside in the form of a toad inside the rock. There are other stone relics such as Dho Mani that consist of prayers inscribed on the rocks. |
| 6.                     | Namgay Tse Lhakhang   | En route Sewala Gompa.   | Located in Sewala village, an old Lhakhang, date unknown, it is a nice Lhakhang with beautiful location outside the village  |
| 7.                     | Tshokhorling Lhakhang   |  | Built by the 4 <sup>th</sup> Je Khenpo Ngawang Thinley   |
| 8.                     | Nguedrupchu Lhakhang  | Access road point /walk  | It was founded by Lama Ngawang Thinley and Ngawang Gyeltshen. It has beautiful statues and wall frescoes, reputedly in gold.   |
| 9.                     | Phuntsho Gompa Chorten  | En route Sewala Gompa  | Located in Sewala village. An old Lhakhang, date unknown. It is a nice Lhakhang with beautiful location outside the village  |
| 10.                    | A rock sculpture of goddess Tara next to Phuntsho Gompa Chorten | It is on the way to Sewala Gompa in a small meadow   | One of the few stone sculptures seen in Bhutan but locally believed to have naturally occurred. Date unknown.  |
| 11.                    | Chubu Tshachu   | About 30 km from Khuruthang.   | Believed to have medicinal value that heals various diseases   |
| 12.                    | Dokosek Menchu  | 30 minutes' walk from Samdingkha road point  | Medicinal spring, in Dokona village. It is believed to cure body itches and arthritis. It must be used as stone bath   |
| 13.                    | Jiligang Lhakhang   | About 3.5 km from Yebesa   | The lhakhang is dedicated to Lama Drukpa Kuenley. It has many relic sites associated with him. The mountain also has religious sites associated with Sharop Gem Dorji from the legend of Milarepa.   |
| <b>Dzomi Gewog</b>     |   |  |  |
| 14.                    | Zhabjeythang  | About 1 hour walk from Jimthang village  | Neys associated with Lama Drukpa Kinley  |
| <b>Goenshari Gewog</b> |   |  |  |
| 15.                    | GoenTsephu Ney Lhakhang   | Has approached road / few min from parking   | It is a sacred site blessed by Guru Rimpoche in the 8th century. Believed to be the second Draphu Maratika. Later the Lhakhang was built. The Lhakhang plays a vital role for people of Goenshari Gewog and the visitors in general. Koma hot spring on the way, ZangdoPelri, vase of long life & holy water   |

|                     |   |  |  |
|---------------------|---|--|--|
| 16.                 | Koma Tshachu                                | About 25 minutes' drive from GoenShari farm road and 30 minutes' walk from the parking           | Hot spring is believed to have been blessed by Guru Rinpoche. There are three pools with different water temperature and healing properties.   |
| <b>Guma Gewog</b>   |   |  |  |
| 17.                 | Punakha Dzong                               | Have road access till the Mochhu riverside car parking   | Built by Zhabdrung Nagwang Namgyel in 1637. It served as capital till 1977.  |
| 18.                 | Changyul Galemo's house                     | Accessible by road, about 1 km road distance from the Punakha Dzong                              | Galemo is the girl in a popular local tragic love story of Gasa Lamai Singye. The tree to which her father tied her can also be seen today.  |
| 19.                 | Wogmin Ngayab Choeling Lhakhang, Khuruthang | Accessible by road   | The temple adds a blend of the tradition to the changing landscape of Khuru town. The old Guru lhakhang, which was originally built by Drubthop Nagi Rinchen has also been renovated and its mural paintings restored. The lhakhang lies within a newly built Rangjung Chorten, which is a replica of Swayambhunath Stupa in Nepal.                            |
| 20.                 | Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang          | Accessible by road, about 5 km road distance from the Khuruthang Town                            | Located in Walakha, on the way to Talo. With a 14-foot bronze statue of Avalokiteshvara and few other bronze statues, the nunnery was consecrated by his holiness Je Khenpo. The chorten resembling Boudhanath stupa of Nepal with black carved marble blocks surrounding it. It's a great place to meditate and catch the mesmerising view of Punakha Valley. |
| 21.                 | Zomlingthang Ground                         | Accessible by road, about 2.5 km road distance from Punakha Dzong.                               | One of the most popular picnicking and camping sites in Punakha.   |
| <b>Kabesa Gewog</b> |   |  |  |
| 22.                 | Chorten Nyingpo                             | Has approached the road /few min from parking. It takes about 1 hours walk from Yusakha village. | Founded by Drukpa Kinley in the 15th Century and later by Gaysay Tenzin Rabgay in the 17th century. Seat of Gasey Jigme Singye the reincarnation of Gesay Tenzin Rabgay.   |
| 23.                 | Thulungang Lhakhang, Yusakha                | Accessible by road, about 17.5 km road distance from the Punakha Dzong                           | One of the many places in Bhutan where Zhandrung Ngawang Namgyal resided. Next to the temple is a huge old cypress tree that grew from the walking stick of Zhabdrung.   |
| 24.                 | Tongzhugang Lhakhang                        | Accessible by road   | Founded by Drupthop Ngagi Rinchen  |
| 25.                 | Dho Mani Ney                                | 1 hour walk along the old route from Corten Nyingpo to Tonzhugang Lhakhang                       | Founded by Drupthop Ngagi Rinchen  |

|                           |                               |  |   |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| 26.                       | Kabji Hoka Tsho               | About 2 hours walk from Chorten Nyingpo.                                 | It Located at an altitude of about 2000M. The trail towards the Tsho starts from Chorten Nyingbo, winter residence of Trulku Gyaltsey Tenzin Rabgye. This stunning and tranquil lake is hidden amidst the thick jungle vegetation and it is considered one of the best and a must visit places in Punakha for an excursion.is about 700 meters long. There is fish in the lake. |
| <b>Limukha Gewog</b>      |                               |  |   |
| 27.                       | Drukpa Kuenley Ney            |  | Lama Drukpa Kuenley is believed to have turned a demoness into a rock that is situated in the middle of the paddy field.  |
| <b>Shenga Bjemi Gewog</b> |                               |  |   |
| 28.                       | Datong Gompa                  | About 2 hours walk from Danglo Village                                   | Associated with Lama Drukpa Kuenley. It is believed that when he shot an arrow from Tibet to ascertain his future lineage, the notch of the arrow touched the hill where the temple has been built.   |
| 29.                       | Jasha Gonpa                   | About little more than an hour from Tsekha or Shenga Lunkha              | Seat of Lama Ngawang Chogyal. There are two fresh water pools believed to be holy water blessed by Lama Ngawang Chogyal.  |
| <b>Talo Gewog</b>         |                               |  |   |
| 30.                       | Talo Sangag Chaling Monastery | Accessible by road about 50 minutes from Punakha.                        | It is the seat of Zhabdrung. The bodies of two Zhabdrungs, Jigme Drakpa and Jigme Chogyal, are preserved in the Lhakhang. Has a monk community of about 70 people. Annual Tshechu is held in the 2nd month, days 8-10 of the traditional calendar.  |
| 31.                       | Pelri Dorji Dhen Lhakhang     | Accessible by road, about 40 minutes from Punakha.                       | Built in the 17 <sup>th</sup> century by the 9 <sup>th</sup> Je Shacha Rinchen. The village surrounding it has houses with unique traditional structures. The temple is believed to represent the Bodhgaya in India.  |
| 32.                       | Jachung Karmo Lhakhang        | A hour drive from Talo Monastery   | Nunnery school or monastery   |
| <b>Toewang Gewog</b>      |                               |  |   |
| 33.                       | Ugyenphu Ney                  | Two days walk from the road point. Trail can be walked from Tami Damchu. | Holy site blessed by the Guru Rinpoche. It is believed that visiting the holy site is as equal to visiting Bodhgaya. The trail to the site is being renovated through the Tourism Flagship program.   |
| 34.                       | Boulder of Tsekha             | Phochhu river below Tsekha village                                       | Associated with Lama Drukpa Kuenley. When he was chased by the villagers, the lama is supposed to have hidden behind a pair of boulders. One of the boulders can still be seen. Another boulder on the river side is believed to have his footprint.  |

### 1.3.5 Tourism trails in Punakha

Hiking around Punakha valley is one of the favoured activities among tourists visiting there. There are many trails connecting various landmarks and communities. As a birding hotspots, some of the trails are also suitable for birdwatching. Tourists who come for birdwatching usually spend about half a day or a full day along the roadsides and riversides of both Phochhu and Mochhu.

Some of the popular trails are listed below:

| Sl. | Trail   | Remarks   |
|-----|---|---|
| 1.  | Samtengang Trek                                   | The trail is approximately 54km and takes about 4 days of trek. It is a fairly easy trek and gives a pleasant journey experience from Punakha to Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag. The trail goes through rhododendron and oak forests, through the villages of Limukha, Chungsakha, Samtengang and Chuzomsa. The trek is usually recommended between March-April and September and October.<br><br>A shorter version of the trek (about 6 to 7 hours) can be experienced from Limukha in Punakha through Sha Phangyul to Chuzomsa in Wangduephodrang.   |
| 2.  | Punakha Winter Trek                               | Also known as the Sinchula Trek. 3 days Trek along the old foot trail from Thimphu to Punakha passes through several villages, forests and rice fields. Starts from Dechen Choling in Thimphu and ends at Chorten Ningpo or Rimchu in Punakha.  |
| 3.  | Jilligang Pine Trail                              | A day hike of about 6 km distance trail (takes about 5 hours). Starts from Yebesa village to Jiligang and ends at Changyul Bridge near Punakha Dzong area. Provides a breathtaking view of the valley. from Jiligang, the trail gradually ascends aloft on the mountainside.  |
| 4.  | Jiligang to Samdingkha (Phochhu side)             | A day hike takes about 5 to 7 hours. The hike is through the beautiful rice paddy field and a sharp descent leading to the Nawakha village, Tempakha village and to Samdingkha.   |
| 5.  | Jiligang to Sewla to Chhubu                       | A day long hike with experiences of visiting different holy sites while enjoying the experiences of nature and birdwatching.  |
| 6.  | Samdingkhag - Nyedrupchu - Chhubu Tshachu         | The trail to Chubu Tsachu has varieties of butterflies and birds. Recommended during spring/early summer.   |
| 7.  | Samdingkha - Nyedrupchu - Sewala Gompa - Changyul |   |
| 8.  | Drukpa Kuenley Heritage Trail                     | There are two possible day hikes, one to Thinleygang which will take about 4 hours and another to Punakha Dzong which will take about three hours.  |
| 9.  | Sonagasa to Punakha Dzong                         | A beautiful walking trail of about 5 km distance from the Palace Gardens to Punakha Dzong.  |
| 10. | Yebipokto Loop to Punakha Dzong                   | Leisure walks of about 2 hours from Yebisa village to Punakha Dzong. The trek trails are easy to follow. The trail leads to a small junction on the same way to the Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten(stupa), (also known as Nyizergang Chöten and Punakha Zangdopelri). You will come across two paths. The right path leads to the Chorten. you have to turn left towards the suspension bridge and follow the trail across the river. The path then leads to a mud-caked road till you reach the main road. From there, you have to turn towards the left and continue following the main road back to the turn-off towards the Punakha Dzong. |

|     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 11. | Talo - Nobgang - Punakha Dzong                 | About 2 hours plus a mild downhill walk along part of the ancient route from Talo to Punakha Dzong. Trail provides a scenic view of the Punakha valley. Walk can also be planned with lunch at the Nobgang traditional restaurant that provides authentic local dishes prepared by the local women. The trail is also suitable for mountain biking. |
| 12. | Punakha Dzong - Dompala Lhakhang - Tsho Chhasa | About 6 hours hike consisting of gradual climb through the Chirpine Forest. Provides adventure with scenic view of the Punakha Dzong, crossing Bhutan's longest suspension bridge. Then a gradual climb through the forest towards Dompala Lhakhang and Tsho Chhasa. From there the trail sharply descends to Khuruthang bridge.                    |
| 13. | Khuruthang - Samdingkha                        | 26 km round trip biking trail along the road. From Khuruthang - Gumkarmo - Khawajara - Samdingkha   |
| 14. | Limukha to Samdingkha                          | Biking trail of almost 14.5 km distance.  |
| 15. | Khuruthang - Shengana                          | 18 km roundtrip biking trail along the road. From Khuruthang town - Tanalungkha- Gara Zam - Shengana.   |
| 16. | Punakha Dzong - Wangdue Dzong                  | A circuit of the Punakha-Wangdue valley. It takes about 40 km round trip biking trail along the road. Start at Punakha Dzong - Khuruthang - Metsina - Wangdue Bridge - Wangdue Dzong. Return via - Bajothang - Jemthang - Khuruthang Bridge - Punakha Dzong.  |
| 17. | Khuruthang - Tashithang                        | About 62 km roundtrip. From Khuruthang - Punakha Dzong - Phuntsho Pelri - Yebesa - Rimchu - Tashithang. Rimchu area is among the hot spots for birding.   |

### 1.3.6 Local food culture

Punakha valley is also known as the rice basket of Bhutan. It produces a variety of rice among which the Ngabja rice and Shengana red rice are known to be special as they are grown only in Punakha. Due to the warm climate and suitable vegetation in Punakha, it is possible to grow a variety of crops throughout the year. Some of the products that are traditional to the Punakha region are listed below.

- » Mengay (Mashed cooked rice eaten in pizza style with zhimtse/perilla paste)
- » Maekhu Bokho (fried puffed cake)
- » Luma Maekhu (flakey rice cracker)
- » Several wild flowers and vegetables such as orchids, fiddlehead, patsha, damroo (wild greens), pangtse seeds (oil seeds) are harvested from the forest.
- » The Pangtsey Makhu (*Symplocos Paniculata*) is a dying food culture that has an opportunity to be revived by diversification of agricultural products that can also be linked to tourism.
- » Zaw (roasted rice): although zaw is one of the common rice products in Bhutan, some of the community of Punakha pride themselves on producing the tastier butter roasted zaw.
- » Geza Sip (roasted and flattened dry corn): The most renowned ones are the variety of Talo sips made from corn at different stages of growth. The sip produced from the corn at the milk line stage is the most expensive one.

- » Roasted corn: one of the highlights of travelling along the highway to Punakha and Wangdue is hot roasted corn sold by local people.
- » Aezay Nyergum: an authentic chilli dish made from nine essential ingredients. The dish is popularly known to be made by people of Talo Nobgang.

### 1.3.7 Events/calendar

| Traditional month                                  | 11   | 12   | 1    | 2     | 3   | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   |
|--|------|------|------|-------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>Activities during the year</b>                  | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | April | May | June | July | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
| Weather  |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>CULTURE</b>                                     |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Punakha Dubchen                                    |      |      | *    |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Punakha Tshechu                                    |      |      | *    |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Talo Tshechu                                       |      |      |      | *     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Dawakha Tshechu                                    | *    |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Ney Bap Tshechu                                    |      |      |      | *     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Dralha Selni annual at Punakha Dzong               |      |      |      |       | *   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Sendha (Month of offering after blessed rainy day) |      |      |      |       |     |      |      | *    | *    | *    |      |      |
| Thongdrel at Chime Lhakhang during Drukpa Tshezhi  |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      | *    |      |
| Chobu/ Jache (summer ritual)                       |      |      |      | *     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |

| AGRICULTURE                                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| Land preparation for cultivation                |   |   | * | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |
| Sow Rice Seeds                                  |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |
| Harvest mustards                                |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |
| Spreading farmyard manures in the field         |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |
| Wheat Harvest                                   |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |
| Land tilling after wheat harvest                |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |
| Annual Ritual                                   | * | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  | * |
| Clear and connect irrigation channel with water |   |   |   | * | * | * |   |   |   |   |  |   |
| Paddy cultivation                               |   |   |   |   |   | * | * |   |   |   |  |   |
| Weeding of paddy fields                         |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |  |   |
| Grass cutting in paddy fields                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |  |   |
| Rice Harvest                                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * | * |  |   |
| Pilgrimage/ visit Hot Spring                    | * | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |

#### 1.4 CBET feasibility and prospects

Meetings were held within the Dzongkhag with all relevant authorities and field visits were undertaken to discuss the prospects of tourism with the communities.

All the consultations at the National, Dzongkhag and Gewog level reveal a promising scope for promoting community-based ecotourism in Punakha. The proximity of Punakha to the capital, Thimphu gives it ease of market access to visitors of all categories – International, Regional (India and Bangladesh), Expatriates, and domestic. There are also fairly adequate provisions of services and amenities.

Some of the key information gathered from the consultations through the Dzongkhag and community meetings was the following:

### 1.4.1 SWOT analysis of CBET in Punakha

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>STRENGTH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Dzongkhag and resident communities are keen to promote CBET.</li> <li>» Availability of potential products such as organic farming, water activities, hiking trails, home stay, hot springs, bird watching.</li> <li>» Landscape conservation prioritised in Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan and Punakha Structural Plan, draft Punakha-Wangdue Regional Development Plan.</li> <li>» Significance of Punakha in the history of Bhutan.</li> <li>» Accessibility to rich cultural and natural heritage sites</li> <li>» Good climatic conditions</li> <li>» Birding hotspot</li> <li>» Accessibility to different types of tourism amenities</li> <li>» Proximity to Thimphu</li> </ul> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEAKNESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Lack of collectivism mindset and practice among most people for community growth.</li> <li>» Punakha is not well known for any of the arts and crafts activities.</li> </ul>   |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Use of farm roads to promote biking tours.</li> <li>» Development of a visitor information centre.</li> <li>» Promote high-value local tourism.</li> <li>» Revive and promote ancient cultural products (e.g. Aezay nyergum, pangtse makhu production culture).</li> </ul>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Possibility of natural disaster due to GLOF</li> <li>» Extreme disturbances along the river and riversides have hindered the WBH habitat.</li> <li>» Increasing landscape changes along the riverside areas are pressured by ad-hoc residential and tourist infrastructure construction.</li> </ul> |

### 1.4.2 Challenges and issues

- » Most of the tourist visitation centered around the dzong. Need to diversify.
- » Unregulated rafting activities have attributed to the declining WBH numbers.
- » Difficulty in providing opportunities for youth engagement.
- » Concerns about waste along the river.
- » Need to compensate private landowners that are WBH habitats.
- » Occurrence of illegal fishing.
- » Many important nyes and lhakhangs of high spiritual value are in need of restoration for tourist visitation.
- » Lack of appropriate marketing of local products.

### **1.4.3 Existing plans to promote tourism development**

- » Visitor information center tentatively to be established at Lobesa proposed.
- » Investments made by the TCB in developing trails to nyes to promote Druk Neykor. i.e., the development of a trail to unexplored Ugyenphu Ney.
- » Value-added products associated with food and agriculture, i.e., establishment of traditional food stalls in each community to promote the local food products.

### **1.4.4 Recommendations from the locals**

- » Develop online information to advertise the village homestays.
- » Improve signage and conduct awareness at WBH sites.
- » Need to restrict some areas that are prime WBH habitats.
- » Develop appropriate bird watching amenities.
- » Invest in online marketing through the usage of SEO (search engine optimization) tools vigorously promote the CBET websites or social media pages. Appoint someone to constantly update the contents and information in the online sites.
- » Support horse riding trail development at Jiligang, the heritage site.
- » Promote health wellbeing tourism programs associated with the promotion of the hot springs of Chhubu and Koma tshachhu.
- » Promote traditional agriculture related hands-on activities and programs, i.e., making maekhu, extracting pangtse makhu, etc.
- » Increase village homestay development in some of the potential villages along the Phochu and Mochu areas.

### **1.4.5 Feasible activities for implementation**

#### ***Product and services development***

- » Identify and support potential homestay development along some of the riverside villages (i.e., Tshekha, Yusakha, Yebesa, etc.).
- » Promote traditional food culture through value addition
- » Support development of horse-riding trails at Jiligang
- » While the development of a horse-riding trail at Jiligang sounds appealing as a tourism product, it is best recommended based on the result of an environmental impact assessment.
- » Explore and develop biking trails
- » There are many farm roads connecting various communities and villages in Punakha. These farm roads could be explored to be promoted as a biking trail.

## **Capacity development**

The capacity development of local communities in various CBET services and skills remains similar in all the project sites.

- » Training on Homestay operators in hospitality and food services
- » Training of local guides (training of local community in guiding skills)
- » Training on preservation and promotion of local food products
- » Enhance community understanding and participation in CBET approaches
- » Train CBET community in entrepreneurship management and marketing
- » Individuals participating in the development and promotion of CBET products would benefit from gaining basic skills in business management and tourism marketing.

## **Marketing**

- » Develop and document CBET promotional packages (educational)
- » Collaborate with the ABTO to revamp the [www.communitytourism.bt](http://www.communitytourism.bt) website using SEO tools.
- » Instead of developing a new website, the existing website that was initially developed by the RSPN and currently managed by the ABTO could be revamped and used as a marketing platform.

# 2. Wangduephorang Dzongkhag

## 2.1 Dzongkhag background

Wangduephodrang dzongkhag lies to the east and south of Punakha sharing its borders also with Gasa, Bumthang, Trongsa, Tsirang, Dagana and Thimphu. It is the largest dzongkhag of the country covering a geographical size of 4029.03 square kilometers. There are 15 gewogs with a total of 558 villages (Dzongkhag information 2018). The total human population stands at 43,102 (2018).

## 2.2 Status of the White-bellied Heron along the habitats in Wangduephodrang

The WBH habitat extends to six gewogs of the dzongkhag. These are Thedtsho, Gasetsho Gom, Gasetsho wom, Rubesa, Daga, and Athang gewogs. Its habitat is mainly along the Punatshangchhu river and its tributaries. Like Punakha, the future of the WBH is not promising due to increased disturbances. Its population in the older habitats like Zawa, Kamechu, Adha and Nangzhina has been declining. None of them were seen after 2013 in Zawa and the Harachhu area, the oldest nesting site, where 6 – 8 birds were found before 2008<sup>5</sup>. The construction activities related to the hydro projects of Punatshangchhu I and II and other human-related activities have caused a major disturbance to the WBH.

## 2.3 Tourism in Wangduephodrang

### 2.3.1 Tourism arrival record

Like Punakha, Wangduephodrang too shares favourable conditions for visitor arrivals with proximity to Thimphu and easy road access. However, in terms of the number of arrivals in the dzongkhag, it is much less than Punakha. Although the Wangduephodrang dzongkhag has its fair share of tourism visits, it has been expressed that a major part of the tourist coming to the Dzongkhag is directed towards the Phobjikha valley. The rest of the gewogs do not have a similar advantage to develop from tourism benefits. Other than being the stopover for tourists travelling towards Phobjikha and Bumthang, the tourism activities within the Wangdue valley benefits from its vicinity to the Punakha and being part of the Punakha-Wangdue valley landscape.

The arrivals of international tourists in 2019 were 20,529 compared to 53,904 of Punakha (BTM, 2019). The main visitation site is Gangtey and Phobjikha valley due to its beautiful landscape and the presence of the Black-necked crane during the winter months. For visitor accommodation, the dzongkhag has a total of 66 (BTM, 2019) accommodation facilities which include 3 five-star category

<sup>5</sup> WBH annual population report, 2021, RSPN

hotels, 8 three-star, 26 nonstar, and 32 village homestays. Majority of these are located in the Phobjikha valley.

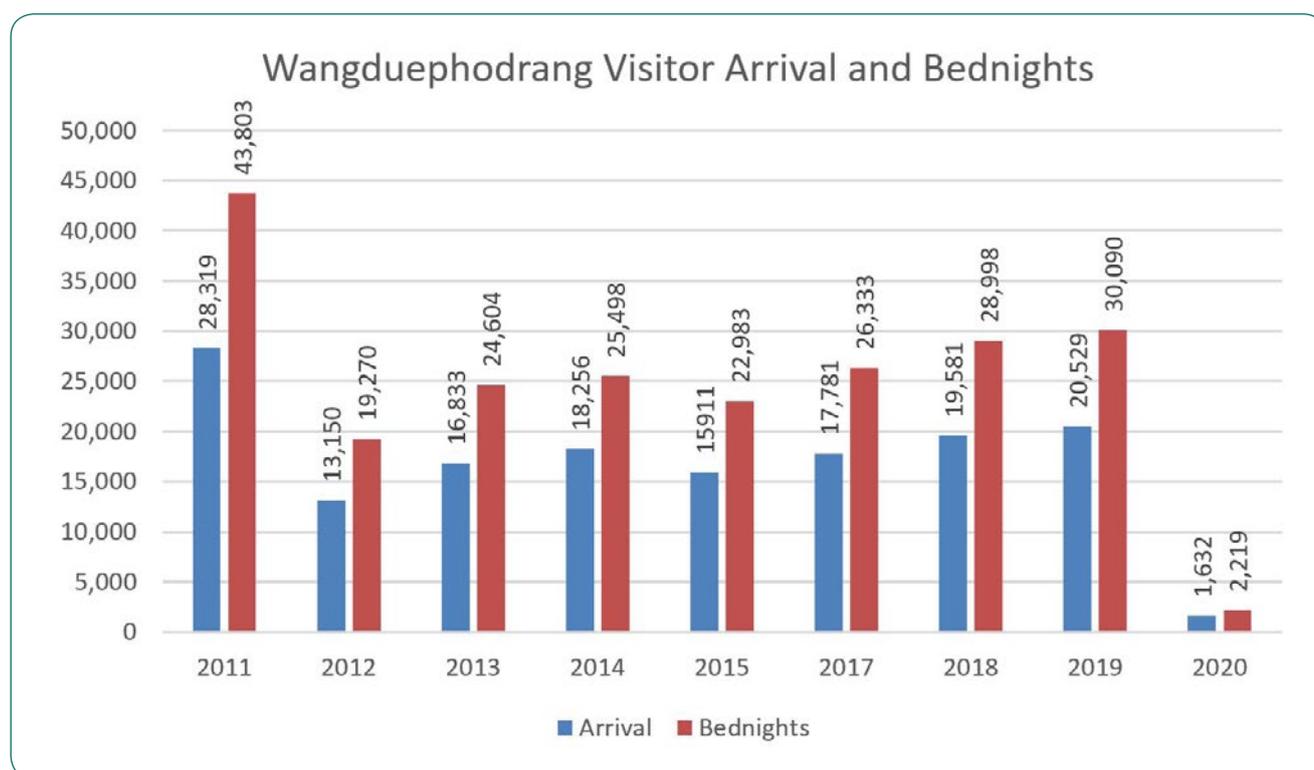


Figure 8: Tourism arrival and bednights record in Wangduephodrang

According to the Bhutan Tourism Monitor, Wangduephodrang has received about 20,529 visitors in 2019. The visitor data of 2011 shows the highest bednights record that had drastically reduced in the following year. However, there has been a steady rise in the number of tourist bed nights in the dzongkhag. According to the Tourism Council of Bhutan total revenue of the establishments from tourists in the Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag is Nu.517.09 million.

### 2.3.2 Tourism amenities in the Dzongkhag

| Amenities                  | Total | Remarks                        |
|----------------------------|-------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Accommodation</b>       |       |                                |
| TCB certified Hotel-3 star | 8     |                                |
| TCB certified Hotel-5 star | 3     |                                |
| Non-TCB certified Hotel    | 26    |                                |
| Village Home Stays         | 32    | All situated in Gangtey-Phobji |
| <b>Food</b>                |       |                                |
| Restaurant                 | 71    |                                |
| Coffee Shop/Cafeteria      | 110   | 24 has bar facility            |

Source: Tourism Establishment Census of Bhutan 2021 and TRI

### 2.3.3 Popular tourism activities in Wangduephodrang

The Wangduephodrang valley along the Punatsangchhu does not have many tourism activities besides visitation to a few cultural sites. Most of the tourism activities happen in other parts of the Dzongkhag, mainly the Phobjikha valley and nearby places.

| Activities                  | Remarks   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Cultural sites visit</b> | Visits include exploring the heritage village of Rinchengang and the Dzong.   |
| <b>Birdwatching</b>         | Some of the popular birding sites are way far from the Punatsangchhu area. The popular birding sites in the Dzongkhag is also the old Pelela route and in Phobjikha valley.   |
| <b>Camping</b>              | Weekend camping in Phobjikha valley is also popular among visitor   |
| <b>Pilgrimage</b>           | There are many sacred places in the Dzongkhag.  |
| <b>Trekking</b>             | Here are trails that connect different villages and cultural/ natural sites within and outside the Dzongkhag. Few of the popular treks are the Punakha Winter Trek, Samtengang Trek which starts from Limbukha in Punakha and ends at Chuzomsa in Wangdue. One of the popular tourism treks, the Gangtey trek became seldom used due to the trekking route getting degraded by introduction of motorable roads. |
| <b>Flyfishing</b>           | Some parts of the Punatsangchhu stretch have been used for recreational fly fishing which is possible with a special permit from the Department of Forests and Park Services.   |

### 2.3.4 Places to visit

| Sl. No              | Cultural and Natural sites | Accessibility                               | Details   |
|---------------------|----------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Athang Gewog</b> |                            |   |   |
| 1.                  | Athang Tsho                | About 5 minutes' walk from the road         | The surface area of the Athag Tsho is 2.38. The lake is surrounded by broadleaved forest on the east and west and paddy fields on the northern side. The people in the community can share the interesting story regarding the belief of how the lake was formed.   |
| 2.                  | Morakha Lhakhang           | Around one hour walk from Lopokha-Phaktakha | Associated with the peling lineage of the Gangtey Trulku.   |
| 3                   | Jarogang Lhakhang          | Accessible by road                          | Beautifully located on a wonderful and magnificent hill overlooking the entire area of Kamechu and Punatsangchu Hydropower Project site. The temple was a residence of Zhabdrung Ngwang Namgyal offered by one of the richest women in the community called Zomlha Chum. There are many important relics left by Zhabdrung among few are his statue made by himself from <i>Bondey</i> rice and a conch, if blown would help to stop windstorm in the community. There are also stone relics in and around the village associated with the events of Zhabdrung. |

|                     |   |   |   |
|---------------------|---|---|---|
| 4.                  | Jackfruit Tree of Jarogang  | Accessible by road                            | Just behind the village, a very healthy-looking jackfruit tree is believed to have grown from the seed planted by Zhabdrung. The first batch of the fruit is offered to Wangdue Phodrang Dzong, Punakha Machen Lhakhang and to the Royal Family.  |
| 5.                  | Harachu (Nya Dosem) (Golden Mahseer Fishery Center)                         | Accessible by road                            | Harachhu is the source of fish for the Nya Dosem, a type of traditional smoked dry fish made by the people of Rukha. A Golden Mahseer Fishery Centre has also been established at the confluence of Harachhu and Punatsangchhu.   |
| 6.                  | Rukha Lhakhang  | Accessible by road                            | This is the only temple that is dedicated to Palden Lhamo, the female deity of Bhutan.  |
| 7.                  | Live museum in Rukha  | Accessible by road                            | Display and demonstration of the Olep culture. Tarayana has supported the revival and preservation of the Olep language among the younger generation.   |
| 8.                  | The golden scripture ( <i>Gyeltong-Selm-Seldri-chenma</i> ) of Zawa village | Accessible by road                            | A treasured relic of the Zawa community. No one knows the origin of the scripture as it was found by a villager about more than a 100 years ago. believe that it was a blessing for the people of Zawa. The people in the village believe they are self-sufficient due to the blessing of the scripture.              |
| <b>Dakar Gewog</b>  |   |   |   |
| 9.                  | Uma Choeling  | Accessible by road                            | Temple was founded by Trulku Jigme Namgyal. The Palm tree in front of the temple is considered sacred. In the catalogue of Temples in Wangdue Dzongkhag, it is recorded that this temple was founded by Trulku Jigme Namgyal. The Palm tree in front of the temple is considered sacred.                              |
| 10.                 | Uma Norbugang Lhakhang  |   | Founded in 16 <sup>th</sup> century   |
| 11.                 | Gebaykha Lhakhang   |   | 55 years ago, Renovated in 2008   |
| 12.                 | Taksha Norbuding Lhakhang   | Accessible by road                            | Year of establishment: 30 yrs ago   |
| 13.                 | Wogay Lhakhang  | Accessible by road                            | Renovated in 2014. The temple is behind the Dakar gewog office and part of the temple is attached to the rocky side of the mountain.  |
| 14.                 | Ompa Ney  | About 1 hour walk downhill from Pinsa village | A cave believed to be a meditation cave of Guru Rinpoche.   |
| 15.                 | Tashi Sili village  |   | A village that is undisturbed by modernization would make a good tourism destination. Local people there are skilled in producing a variety of bamboo crafts.   |
| <b>Rubesa Gewog</b> |   |   |   |
| 16.                 | Wangduephodrang Dzong   | Accessible by road                            | It was built in 1638-9 to monitor the routes connecting the country southward. According to the traditional geomancy, its location is considered highly auspicious, as it is where three waterways, three ridges and three skies converge. It was destroyed by fire in 2012 and currently the renovation is going on. |

|                      |  |   |   |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| 17.                  | Nyizergang Gaydhen Choeling Lhakhang       | Accessible by road. About 30 minutes' drive from the high-way | Built in the 13 <sup>th</sup> century, the Nyinzer gang Lhakhang is one of the oldest monasteries in Wangdue. It is believed that the people of Nyinzer gang once suffered from epilepsy caused by evil spirits. Terton Wugpa Lingpa is said to have subdued the evil spirits and built the temple there. It has been the seat of the Nyinzer Trulku.         |
| 18.                  | Ruins of Wangdzop Domchu's house           |   | Wangdzop Domchu was one of the prominent Wangdue Dzongpon who ruled over Shar Dha Gyad.   |
| <b>Thetsho Gewog</b> |  |   |   |
| 19.                  | Rinchengang village (Old Heritage village) | Accessible by road.   | One of the oldest villages in Bhutan and famous for their proficiency in traditional skills in stonework. It is designated as a model heritage village by the Department of Culture. The village tourism is being supported through the Tourism Flagship program.   |
| 20.                  | Remains of old cantilever bridge           | Accessible by road.   | Remains of old cantilever bridge across the river Tsang chhu below the Dzong. It is a testament of traditional engineering skills of Bhutanese in olden times. Only the centre tower remains today since the bridge was destroyed by flood in 1968.   |
| 21.                  | Radrap Nyekhang                            | Accessible by road.   | Located between the Dzong and the army camp, it is dedicated to Ap Radrap who was appointed by Zhabdrung as the deity of the Sha region.  |
| 22.                  | Bajo Lhakhang                              | Accessible by road.   | It is believed to be the abode of Thangthong Gyalpo. The existing Lhakhang was shifted to the present location during the 15 <sup>th</sup> century. It is also believed that the Lhakhang was originally constructed in the 14 <sup>th</sup> century near the present Bajo town. Till now the Lhakhang was also used as a school for junior monastic studies. |

### 2.3.5 Tourism trails in Wangduephodrang (Punatsangchhu area)

The Wangdue side of the Punatsangchhu valley does not have many hiking trails that are well known or preferred by visitors. Following is some of the popular trails:

| Sl. | Trail                                      | Remarks   |
|-----|--|---|
| 1.  | NyaTshe GayKha Village to the Wind Turbine | The trail is approximately 1.5 km uphill hike from the NyaTshe GayKha Village. It is a fairly easy hike and throughout the climb the view of the Wangduephodrang Dzong can be enjoyed.  |
| 2.  | Bajo towards Punakha                       | About 1 km walk along the riverside to observe the river birds, preferably during the winter. The area is rich in migratory water bird species such as the ibis bill, plover lapwing and endangered species like white-bellied heron.   |
| 3.  | Rinchengang village hike                   | The Rinchengang village has become one of the must-visit rural villages in Wangdue Phodrang District. It takes about 20 to 30 minutes' walk or longer if visitors spend more time to get a more in-depth experience of the village. The uniquely clustered village is visible from all the corners and entices every traveler's attention to learn about the village. |

|    |                               |  |
|----|-------------------------------|--|
| 4. | Wangdue Dzong - Punakha Dzong | A circuit of the Punakha-Wangdue valley. It takes about 40 km round trip biking trail along the road. Start at Wangdue Dzong – Wangdue Bridge – Metsina - Khuruthang – Punakha Dzong. Return via Punakha Dzong – Khuruthang Bridge – Jemthang – Bajothang.                     |
| 5. | Athang to Phobjikha           | A 2 days trek from Athang to Phobjikha is the ancient route used by the people of Athang while migrating to Phobjikha during the summer. The trail passes through gorges and valleys while giving the possibility of seeing a variety of flora, fauna and birds along the way. |

### 2.3.6 Local crafts

While Punakha is not known for craft production, the Punatsangchhu part of the Wangdue valley is well known for its bamboo and cane products, especially the people of Athang Rukha and the Tasha Sili village of Dagar gewog. Even though resources are available and there are some skilled people who can produce the crafts in the community, they face the difficulty of marketing their products. The following are the list of products that are produced by the community.

| Sl. No. | Products   | Gewogs        |
|---------|--|---------------|
| 1.      | Bichap   | Dakar, Athang |
| 2.      | Bangkha  | Dakar, Athang |
| 3.      | Changsho   | Dakar, Athang |
| 4.      | Jatsa (tea strainer)                                   | Dakar, Athang |
| 5.      | Zeko   | Dakar, Athang |
| 6.      | Kuchu  | Dakar, Athang |
| 7.      | Bow and Arrow (arrows are made from Dhew-Yanka bamboo) | Dakar, Rubesa |
| 8.      | Zari (scooping ladle)                                  | Dakar         |
| 9.      | Zencha (ladle)   | Dakar         |
| 10.     | Tseku (bamboo basket)                                  | Dakar, Athang |
| 11.     | Nya Dosem making                                       | Dakar, Athang |
| 12.     | Zem (traditional basket with lid)                      | Athang        |
| 13.     | Parey  | Athang        |
| 14.     | Chonju Gyep  | Athang        |

### 2.3.7 Local food culture

- » Nya Dosem (traditional smoked dry fish)
- » Mengay (Mashed cooked rice eaten in pizza style with zhimtse (perilla) paste)
- » Puffed Maekhu (fried rice cracker)

- » Fern with cheese (Fern is abundant in the wild and they harvest it two times as Nakey and Tenkay)
- » Revive traditional healthy food made from local cereals, i.e., chutay (bagel/ doughnut shaped dough cooked in water), khuley (buckwheat pancake), home-made cooked flat noodle mixed in whey.
- » Mustard oil: Gewog wants to emphasize on mustard seed production. Other value-added products could be introduced using mustard oil.
- » Sokay Shamu mushrooms grow in abundance in the wild, people harvest it and dry the mushrooms.

### 2.3.8 Events/calendar

| Traditional month                    | 11   | 12   | 1    | 2     | 3   | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Activities during the year           | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | April | May | June | July | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
| Weather                              |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>CULTURE</b>                       |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Wangdue Tshechu                      |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      | *    |      |      |
| Gangtey Tshechu                      |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      | *    |      |      |
| Black-necked Crane Festival          |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      | *    |      |
| Uma Tshechu                          |      |      |      |       |     | *    |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Bonku                                |      |      |      | *     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Pho lha and Yul lha soelkha          | *    |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Telda Tshechu at Jarogang            |      |      |      |       |     |      | *    |      |      |      |      |      |
| Hata Lhapsa Gyem at Jarogang         |      | *    |      |       | *   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Gyelma Lhaley Bap Dechen at Jarogang |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      | *    |      |
| <b>AGRICULTURE</b>                   |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Land preparation for cultivation     |      | *    | *    |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Sow Rice Seeds                       |      |      | *    |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Harvest mustards                     |      |      | *    |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Spread farmyard manure in the field  |      |      |      | *     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Wheat Harvest                        |      |      |      |       | *   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| Land tilling after wheat harvest                |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |
| Annual Ritual                                   | * | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  | * |
| Clear and connect irrigation channel with water |   |   |   | * | * | * |   |   |   |   |  |   |
| Paddy cultivation                               |   |   |   |   |   | * | * |   |   |   |  |   |
| Weeding of paddy fields                         |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |  |   |
| Grass cutting in paddy fields                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |  |   |
| Rice Harvest                                    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * | * |  |   |
| Sokay Shamu harvest                             |   | * | * | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |

## 2.4 CBET feasibility and prospects

The people living within the WBH habitat remain interested in participating in the development of CBET. A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis was conducted.

### 2.4.1 SWOT Analysis of CBET in Wangdue Valley

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>STRENGTH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Active farming community.</li> <li>» A living culture with many cultural attractions in addition to natural attractions such as scenic areas and hiking trails.</li> <li>» Strong interest in the community especially the youth to participate in CBET.</li> <li>» The impressive view of the Wangduephodrang Dzong is seen from all parts of the valley.</li> <li>» Available existing tourism amenities (mainly accommodations and restaurants)</li> <li>» People and Rubesa, Athang and Dagar gewog are skilled in Tshagzo (cane and bamboo craft)</li> <li>» Traditional Nya Dosem "smoked dry fish" from Athang Rukha is a unique product of Wangdue.</li> <li>» Diverse skills of people in Rinchengang in wood, stone and painting crafts.</li> </ul> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEAKNESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» The Wangdue valley has become a transit for tourists travelling to Phobjikha or Bumthang.</li> <li>» The ongoing Punatsangchhu project negates tourism that aspire to get authentic Bhutanese cultural experience or nature related activities.</li> <li>» Most places with scenic views are very windy.</li> <li>» Poor condition of farm roads discourages visitors.</li> <li>» Lack of awareness and understanding of the local people on tourism development.</li> <li>» Lack of capacity and infrastructure to cater to tourism services and development.</li> </ul> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Proximity to Thimphu and the National highways.</li> <li>» Future development and promotion of tourism along the Punatsangchhu dam sites and tunnels after the projects are complete.</li> <li>» Increasing educated youth in the community to invest in tourism skills. E.g., Rukha had many educated youths.</li> </ul>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Possibility of natural disaster due to GLOF</li> <li>» Increased sand mining and fishing activities.</li> <li>» Constructions and activities of hydro projects.</li> <li>» Losing the indigenous language and culture, i.e., the Olep communities in Wangdue.</li> </ul>   |

#### **2.4.2 Challenges and issues**

- » The proximity of the expanding urban settlements close to the riverside could impact WBH habitats.
- » An increasing number of unemployed youths could lead to social concerns and issues.
- » Sand mining right below the majestic Dzong and the Rinchengang heritage contradicts the tourism objectives.
- » Lack of sufficient incentive to conserve heritage sites. The younger generation in Rinchengang village is not inspired to conserve their heritage due to lack of significant incentives. They inspire to have houses with convenient and modern facilities.
- » Concerns about waste along the river.
- » Lack of a marketing platform for local craft products.
- » Lack of skills in diversifying the excess rice produced and stocked by households in the communities.

#### **2.4.3 Existing plans to promote tourism development**

- » Investments made by TCB in developing tourism facilities in Rinchengang.
- » Training of local youth in tailoring skills provided by RENEW.
- » Value-added products associated with food and agriculture, i.e., establishment of agriculture products and food stalls in Rinchengang.

#### **2.4.4 Recommendations from the locals**

- » Promote traditional agriculture related hands-on activities and programs, i.e., making maekhu, extracting mustard oil, harvesting wild mushrooms, etc.
- » Potential for developing village home stays, i.e., the Nya Tshey Gaykha village, Jarigang villages.
- » Restore the old migration route from the Wangdue valley to another part of the district. i.e, the trail from Rubesa to Khotokha provides a scenic view of Talo, Nobgang Sewla and Lamsekha in Punakha; a mule track from Zamding to Khotokha via Jala-Ula village.
- » Promote traditional archery sports using the bow and arrow produced by local people, including the traditional arrow made from Dhew-Yanka bamboo.
- » Provide weaving training to youths in Rinchengang and nearby communities to provide skills in textile art and craft.
- » Preserve and promote the culture of Dralha Pangthey (ritual performances of Pazaps and Pow).
- » Develop recreational places with swimming pools along riverbanks of the Punatsangchhu at Dagar gewog.
- » Promote places associated with the local legendary stories, i.e., Ada Tenzi Pem, Ada Tarey Duem, Rubey Nyakaphushi, etc.

## 2.4.5 Feasible activities for implementation

### ***Product and services development***

- » Identify and support potential homestay development along some riverside villages (i.e., Nyatshey Gaykha and Jarogang).
- » Enhance development of local craft products

### ***Capacity development***

- » Training on Homestay operators in hospitality and food services
- » Training of local guides
- » Training local youth in bamboo and cane craft production
- » Enhance community understanding and participation in CBET approaches
- » Train CBET community in entrepreneurship management and marketing

### ***Marketing***

- » Develop and document CBET promotional packages
- » Collaborate with the ABTO to revamp the [www.communitytourism.bt](http://www.communitytourism.bt) website using SEO tools.

# 3. Tsirang Dzongkhag

## 3.1 Dzongkhag background

Tsirang is in the central south of the country bordered by Dagana, Wangduephodrang, Trongsa, and Sarpang. It is one of the smallest dzongkhags in the country covering a geographic size of 639 square kilometres. The natural landscape consists of gentle slopes and rich biodiversity. Culturally the people are dominated by the lhotshampa community adding to the cultural diversity. The dzongkhag is divided into 12 gewogs with a total population of 23,771 (2022). Agriculture is the main livelihood of the people with the availability of a variety of crops and fruits due to the favourable climatic conditions. Due to its prominence in producing a variety of agricultural crops and livestock products, it has also been referred to as Bhutan's kitchen garden.

## 3.2 Status of the White-bellied Heron along the habitats in Tsirang

The WBH habit follows the mid and lower region of the punatsangchhu basin. It is reported to habitat areas within six gewogs of Patshaling, Phuentenchu, Tsirangtoed, Tsholingkhar, Rangthaling, and Barshong. While the upper region of the basin is facing more threats leading to a decline in the number of WBH the mid-region looks more promising. Burchhu and wakletar areas are showing an increase in population trend and nesting frequency. Changchay, Sunkosh, Toedsang, Balwani, and Kalikhola are the habitats. A WBH conservation breeding center has also been established in Changchay. It presently has two WBH, a male and a female.

Compared to the upper region of the river basin the habitat in Tsirang faces lesser disturbances. Although some human-related disturbances still exist.

## 3.3 Tourism in Tsirang

### 3.3.1 Tourism arrival record

Tsirang has been one of the least visited tourism destinations in Bhutan and statistically it has constantly been the lowest or the second lowest tourist visited Dzongkhag next to Dagana and Sarpang. However, the tourism data over the past years have indicated a steady rise in the number of bed-nights that tourists are spending in Tsirang. From a total of 12 bed-nights in 2013, the number of bed-nights had risen to 107 in 2019.

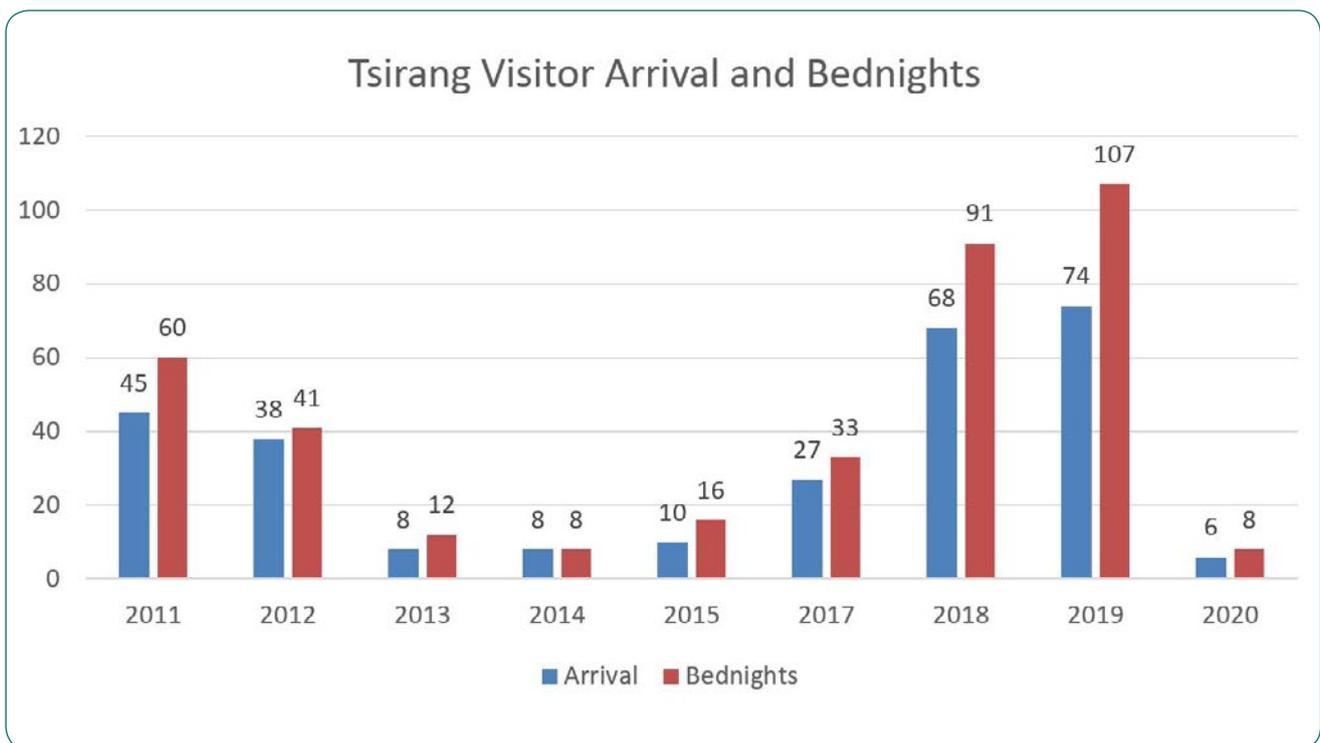


Figure 9: Tourism arrival and bednights record in Tsirang

According to the tourism establishment census carried out in 2021, there is only one 3 star rated hotel in Tsirang and four budget or non-star rated hotels, all of which are hotels located in Damphu town. However, the tourism resource inventory has listed nine budget hotels. According to the Tourism Council of Bhutan, the total revenue of tourism establishments in the Tsirang Dzongkhag is Nu.59.35 million from tourists.

### 3.3.2 Tourism amenities in the Dzongkhag

| Amenities                  | Total | Remarks         |
|----------------------------|-------|-----------------|
| <b>Accommodation</b>       |       |                 |
| TCB certified Hotel-3 star | 1     |                 |
| Non-TCB certified Hotel    | 4     | 9 listed in TRI |
| <b>Food</b>                |       |                 |
| Restaurant                 | 29    |                 |
| <b>Entertainment</b>       |       |                 |
|                            | 1     |                 |

### 3.3.3 Popular tourism activities in Tsirang

The Wangduephodrang valley along the Punatsangchhu does not have many tourism activities besides visitation to a new cultural site. Most of the tourism activities happen in other parts of the Dzongkhag, mainly the Phobjikha valley and nearby places.

| Activities          | Remarks  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Birdwatching</b> | Few responsible tour operators who are aware of the WBH habitats would bring tourists to Tsirang specifically for viewing WBH and birdwatching purposes. |
| <b>Farm visits</b>  | There are few tour operators who promote and organise farm visit activities for tourists. Most of the farms promoted are located in Sergithang.          |

### 3.3.4 Places to visit

Following are the lists of some of the landmarks:

| Sl. No                   | Cultural and Natural sites          | Accessibility  | Details   |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Barshong Gewog</b>    |                                     |  |   |
| 1.                       | Lhachhen gi ney                     | About 1 hour 10 minutes' walk from Barshong village. | Holy site is believed to be associated with the goddess Maha Devi.  |
| 2.                       | Balwani WBH site                    | Accessible by road and old walking trail.            | The furthest village in Tsirang facing towards Dagana. Can view the Daga chhu and Sunkosh confluence.   |
| <b>Patshaling Gewog</b>  |                                     |  |   |
| 3.                       | Market at Chanchey                  | Accessible by road                                   | Located beside the main highway to Tsirang, the small market displays different types of spicy pickles and variety of agriculture products of Tsirang.  |
| <b>Phuenthechu Gewog</b> |                                     |  |   |
| 4.                       | Mangla Bazaar                       | Accessible by road                                   | Business hub  |
| 5.                       | Genzin Dratshang                    | Accessible by road                                   | Buddhist monastic institution   |
| <b>Rangthaling Gewog</b> |                                     |  |   |
| 6.                       |                                     |  |   |
| 7.                       |                                     |  |   |
| <b>Sergithang Gewog</b>  |                                     |  |   |
| 8.                       | HBT Organic Farm 360 Degree Views   |  | Located at the beautiful hill top called Gorjurey under Sergithang Teo at an altitude of 1400m.   |
| 9.                       | Lung Si Gang Viewpoint/ Hawa Dangra | Accessible by road                                   | Popular hotspot for lunch and picnic for people travelling to other districts via Tsirang. There is also a white stupa and gazebo for people to relax. Just a few meters away from stupa, one can find local vendors selling fresh local products. It is worth a stop point for leg stretch walks and for the amazing Punachu river view below. |
| 10.                      | Nugoo Farm Sergithang               |  | One of the examples of successful commercial modern agriculture farming and leading producer of eggs and organic vegetables in Tsirang  |

|                           |  |  |   |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|
| 11.                       | Tashithang Fish Farm                         | Accessible by road                                       | Upcoming fish farm and supposed to be one of the largest in the country. This can also introduce recreational fishing activities.   |
| 12.                       | Old Bazaar in Tashithang                     | Accessible by road                                       | Places where some of the community still visit for shopping.  |
| 13.                       | Bird watching site at Thidovane in Sathmanty |  | Great hornbill and Rufous-necked Hornbill can be sighted there.   |
| <b>Tsirangtoed Gewog</b>  |  |  |   |
| 14.                       | Pema Choling Heritage Forest                 |  | Site of the old Tsirang Dzong. Elders in the community believe that over 200 years ago, it was a place of a mighty King who was known as Sang Sup Gyap. They believe that this king lost his life in the internal civil war during the reign of Jigme Namgyal.<br>As per the locals, the chorten was found on a hill top which is now known to have been built by the king. It is a religious site worshipped by the locals.  |
| 15.                       | Bell of Tsirangtoe                           | About 20 minutes' walk from Pema Choling Heritage Forest | On a full moon night, which is a great occasion, the locals tell stories about being able to listen to the religious trumpets which were being played in olden days at midnight. However, it cannot be heard any more after one of these bells from Nye few to the Thasa of the Dagana Dzongkhag.<br>The locals believe that another pair of the bell is on Lhajap Goeg which is the opposite hill. People tell stories that they can clearly see it's hanging on Thasa Village cliff using binoculars. |
| 16.                       | Tsirangtoe Lhakhang                          | Accessible by road                                       | It is believed that the precious treasure (packed in leather bags) belonging to the local King Sang Sup Gyap some 200 years ago is now kept at the Tsirangtoe Lhakhang. This Lhakhang is one of the oldest among Lhakhangs in Tsirang district. The ruins of Tsirangtoed Dzong area are now fenced about 45 acres which is now considered as Pemacholing Heritage Forest. One of the best designed and protected forests with beautiful hiking trails.  |
| 17.                       | Gomba Dara (Guru's ney)                      | 15 mins walk from Lhakhang                               | Holy site that has Guru's thumbprint on the roof (seto); Do akha (dough shaped stone); Om Banza Guru (inscribed on the rock); a bell (Dilbu) hanging on the roof of the chorten. It is believed that the bell existed in part and the other one flew to the rocky cliff of Tha Namkhai Dzongin Dagana where it can still be seen today.   |
| 18.                       | Threma Lhakhang                              | Accessible by road                                       | Also consists of a meditation site. Located at a tri-junction between Tsirangtoe, Phuentenchu and Sergithang.   |
| <b>Tsholingkhor Gewog</b> |  |  |   |
| 19.                       | Tsholingkhar Viewpoint/ Kutidara             | Accessible by road                                       | There is also a temple from where you will get the majestic view of Sunkosh river, Dagana highway, Drujeygang, Tsangkha and other parts of Dagana as well. A good stop over to take the photographs and relax.  |
| <b>Kilkhorthang Gewog</b> |  |  |   |
| 20.                       | Tsirang Dzong                                | Accessible by road. Half a kilometer from Damphu town.   | Unlike many of the traditional dzongs that have historical significance and reference to the Zhabdrung, this Dzong is new and only built in 2004 and inaugurated in 2008.   |

|     |  |                    |  |
|-----|--|--------------------|--|
| 21. | Rigsum Pemai Dumra                     | Accessible by road | The recreational park has two huge concrete gazebos, – fountain, a mani Dungkor, an artificial Lake with an arched bridge over it a children's playing zone  |
| 22. | Buddhist-Hindu Temple                  | Accessible by road | Temple that portrays the coexistence of the Buddhist and Hindu tradition and culture. Hindu temple is on the left and the Buddhist temple is on the right. Bhutan's Hindu dharma foundation leads the Hindu temple and Tsirang Dratsang leads the Buddhist temple. |
| 23. | Professional Development Centre of RAA | Accessible by road | The training centre attracts government officials from various parts of the country.   |

### 3.3.5 Tourism trails in Tsirang

Tsirang is known for its mild climate and gentle slopes which makes it ideal for hiking and trekking along many trekking routes.

| Sl. | Trail                                   | Remarks  |
|-----|---|--|
| 1.  | Old route from Damphu to Gelephu        | 3 days walk  |
| 2.  | Damphu to Wangdue                       | 7 days   |
| 3.  | Sergithangtoe to Athang trekking route  | A moderate trekking trail along the ancient highway.   |
| 4.  | Chanchey- Sunkosh -Balwani              | A day-long hiking trail along the old route is rich in biodiversity, especially for birding.   |
| 5.  | Tsirangtoe to Tsirang Dzong             |  |
| 6.  | Changchey to Salamji village            | The beautiful Salamji village across Chanchey falls under the Dagana Dzongkhag. It takes about one hour to hike after crossing the river. Many of the local people from Salamji come to sell their products at Chanchey. |
| 7.  | Wakletar to Darachhu                    | Trail suitable for birdwatching.   |
| 8.  | Rilangthang ORC-Sunkosh – Suwan village | 45 minutes walk  |
| 9.  | Katmaro - Hawadangra                    | 2 hours walk   |

### 3.3.6 Local crafts

Parts of Tsirang have people who are talented in different crafts skills such as wood carving, farm tool making, blacksmith, straw weaving, cane and bamboo weaving and indigenous medicine practice skills. Following are some of the crafts made by people in various communities.

| Sl. No. | Products   |
|---------|--|
| 1.      | Furniture product out of cane and bamboo (chair, basket, handbag, dustbin and flowerpot) |
| 2.      | House furniture out of rice straw (straw mat, pira, decorative mat)                      |
| 3.      | Grinding stone (local name: Diki) used for grinding grain into powder using feet.        |
| 4.      | Making of Horse saddle and plough (local name: Yoke).                                    |
| 5.      | Oil expeller machine is also locally made.   |
| 6.      | Making of mug and dhapa (wooden plate) using wood  |
| 7.      | Block print carving (Sopa)   |
| 8.      | Sheep wool fabric (belt, blanket and mat)  |

### 3.3.7 Local food culture

- » Choti rice – local rice from Tsirang.
- » Shelroti.
- » Wachipa (fried chicken with fried chicken feather)-specialty of the locals.
- » Kheer (Dish made of rice and buffalo milk).
- » Dhaichura (Milk with roasted flat rice).
- » Dakani (fried rice with butter).
- » Gungdruk (Dried fermented spinach)
- » Lichen dish (lichen mixed with animal blood).
- » Daro (cooked millet powder.
- » Nettle shoot soup.
- » Bamboo shoots curry and pickles.
- » Sukuti (smoked dried meat).
- » Seam sag/spinach curry and soup.
- » Lundi (tender maize crushed and wrapped in banana leaves and steamed to be eaten as pancakes).
- » Furawloo (fried lentils).
- » Organic paper from bamboo bark (Patshaling)

### 3.3.8 Events/calendar

| Traditional month   | 11   | 12   | 1    | 2     | 3   | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   |
|---|------|------|------|-------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Activities during the year  | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | April | May | June | July | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
| Weather   |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>CULTURE</b>  |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Tsirang Tshechu   |      |      |      | *     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Community Tshechu at public Lhakhang (Samdrup Gatshel Lhakhang), sergithangtoed | *    |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Losar (New Year festival) in sergithang maet, Tashithang and Norbugang.         |      | *    |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Chaitey Dasai (Festival of food and drink)                                      |      |      | *    |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Community Tshechu Sergithang  |      |      | *    | *     |     |      |      |      |      | *    |      |      |
| Asara pandra (fifteen-Dai chu event)  |      |      |      |       |     | *    |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Maijara (end of paddy transplantation)  |      |      |      |       |     |      | *    |      |      |      |      |      |
| Sauna sakrati (removal of bad omen festival)                                    |      |      |      |       |     |      | *    |      |      |      |      |      |
| Dassian festival  |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      | *    |      |      |
| Diwali (festival of light)  |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      | *    |      |
| Naghi (offering of new harvest festival)  |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      | *    |      |
| Lochoe (Annual rimdro period)   |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      | *    |
| Guru Dham (Paw dance-shaman gathering)  |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      | *    |
| <b>AGRICULTURE</b>  |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Magay, Sakrati (Wild Yam/potato) festival, lhostham community.                  |      | *    |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Land preparation for paddy plantation   |      |      |      | *     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Sowing of maize   |      |      |      | *     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Land preparation for paddy cultivation  |      |      |      |       | *   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Paddy cultivation   |      |      |      |       | *   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Paddy harvesting season   |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      | *    |      |

### 3.4 CBET feasibility and prospects

Tourism development is still at its nascent stage in Tsirang. Although there are several attractions, the dzongkhag has not been able to optimize tourism opportunities. One major limitation is the lack of proper accommodation and service facilities. Presently the dzongkhag has only one 3 star rated accommodation and no certified village home stays. Further there is no record of the dzongkhag developing any tourism plan. These factors have been attributed to low arrivals. In 2019 the arrivals were 74 international tourists (BTM, 2019). The cultural diversity and rich biodiversity within the gentle slopes and favourable climatic conditions have the potential to make Tsirang an attractive travel destination. Based on the dzongkhag and field consultations the SWOT analysis provided the following findings.

#### 3.4.1 SWOT analysis of CBET in Tsirang

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>STRENGTH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Favourable climatic conditions offering year-round visitation.</li> <li>» Close-up sightings of WBH.</li> <li>» Presence of critically endangered Chinese Pangolin.</li> <li>» Availability of diversity of vegetables and fruits. Existence of poultry, piggery, fishery farms and bee keeping.</li> <li>» Active farming communities.</li> <li>» Largely rural landscape setting and traditional livelihood practices.</li> <li>» Strong interest in the community especially the youth to participate in CBET.</li> <li>» Tsirang has many high value forests that are rich in flora and fauna including more than 400 varieties of birds.</li> <li>» OGOP intervention</li> </ul> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEAKNESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Poor condition of farm roads, which would discourage visitors.</li> <li>» Lack of awareness and understanding of the local people on tourism development.</li> <li>» Lack of local capacity and relevant infrastructure to cater tourism related products and services.</li> <li>» Traditional houses being replaced by modern structure made from concrete</li> </ul> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Suitable for agro-based ecotourism development.</li> <li>» Target educational tourism market.</li> <li>» Promoted as a winter retreat.</li> <li>» Have potential to develop homestays and tented resorts or eco-camping.</li> <li>» Diversification of local craft products.</li> <li>» Promote bird watching, butterfly, agro-tourism, fly-fishing, hiking and biking tours.</li> <li>» Create Changche-Tsirang-Dagana tourism circuit</li> </ul>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» The possibility of the Sunkosh hydropower project.</li> <li>» Forest fire hazards during the winter season</li> </ul>   |

### 3.4.2 Challenges and issues

- » Tsirang lacks many of the amenities needed for tourism, there is a need to increase tourism standard accommodations and create more diversified products that are unique to the Dzongkhag.
- » Lack of a marketing platform for local craft products.
- » Village Homestay was developed in Patshaling through the OGOP (one gewog one product) program but still lacks the requirement set by TCB.
- » Increasing waste issues

### 3.4.3 Existing plans to promote tourism development

The Dzongkhag and the gewogs are interested in tourism development in Tsirang. Although the Dzongkhag plans have been focused on the objectives of food security, community vitality, sustainable resource management, infrastructure development and preserving the local culture and tradition, there was not much direct investment in tourism development. The following are the only existing plans that include tourism development initiatives:

- » Development of a hot-stone bath facility at Sunkosh.
- » Value-added products are associated with food and agriculture.

### 3.4.4 Recommendations from the locals

- » Tsirang Toe and Sergithang are excellent locations for homestay development.
- » The fishery pond in Sergithang might be kept up and turned into a park where people may fish and engage in extracurricular activities like those in Lam-Peri Park.
- » Possibility of creating an eco-trail that runs from Sukosh to the Balwanin in Barshog
- » Potential of Toesang in Barshong, and Burichuu for high-end fishery (catch and release) of golden mahseer.
- » Emphasize strongly on tourism marketing.

### 3.4.5 Feasible activities for implementation

#### ***Product and services development***

- » Identify and support potential homestay development in Tsirang Toe, Rilangthang (Sunkosh) and Sergithang gewogs.
- » Enhance the development of local craft products
- » Develop eco-trails
- » Develop agro/ farm-based activities

#### ***Capacity development***

- » Training on Homestay operators in hospitality and food services
- » Training of local guides

- » Training local community and youths in diversifying local crafts production
- » Enhance community understanding and participation in CBET approaches
- » Train CBET community in entrepreneurship management and marketing

### **Marketing**

- » Develop and document CBET promotional packages.
- » Collaborate with the ABTO to revamp the [www.communitytourism.bt](http://www.communitytourism.bt) website using SEO tools.

# 4. Dagana Dzongkhag

## 4.1 Dzongkhag background

Dagana is located in the southern part of the country bordered by Chukha, Thimphu, Wangduephodrang, Tsirang, and Sarpang. The dzongkhag is administratively divided into 14 gewogs and one Dungkhag. Since the altitude ranges from 100 meters to 4700 meters above sea level, the Northern part of the Dzongkhag lies in the temperate zone while the lower Southern parts lies in the subtropical zone. Therefore, the Dzongkhag is one of the most suitable places for cultivation of all kinds of crops. The population of the Dzongkhag stands at 24,965 as per 2017 census records.

The district is mainly inhabited by two major ethnic groups, the Ngalops and the Lhotshampas. However, in recent years, people from other regions have migrated to the region. This has added to the cultural diversity of the region with the introduction of new festivals and traditions.

## 4.2 Status of the White-bellied Heron along the habitats in Dagana

The WBH habitat extends to eight gewogs of the dzongkhag. These are Lajab, Tshangkha, Drujegang, Tashiding, Tsendagang, Lhomoizingkha, Dorona, and Nichula gewogs. Its habitat is mainly along the Dagachhu river and its tributaries. If the Sunkosh project is realized then the future of the WBH would not look promising due to increased disturbances. One of the prominent habitats are the one above the Dagachhu Dam, Dagachhu Confluence with Sunkosh, Lamoizhingkha, Karmaling, Rangaetar, Sama Davan, above Samachhu, Phibsoo Khola and Longa Khola.

## 4.3 Tourism in Dagana

### 4.3.1 Tourism arrival record

Dagana Dzongkhag is also one of the least visited places in the country. Although it is not very significant, there has been a gradual rise in the number of tourists visiting the Dzongkhag. From a total of 1 visitor in 2012, the number of visitors has risen to 30 in 2019. However, the statistics are based only on the record of tourists that is registered through the TCB. Domestic tourism seems to have been increasing due to the promotion of the cultural sites in Dagana and the gaining popularity of the Dagala trek.

## Dagana Visitor Arrival and Bednights

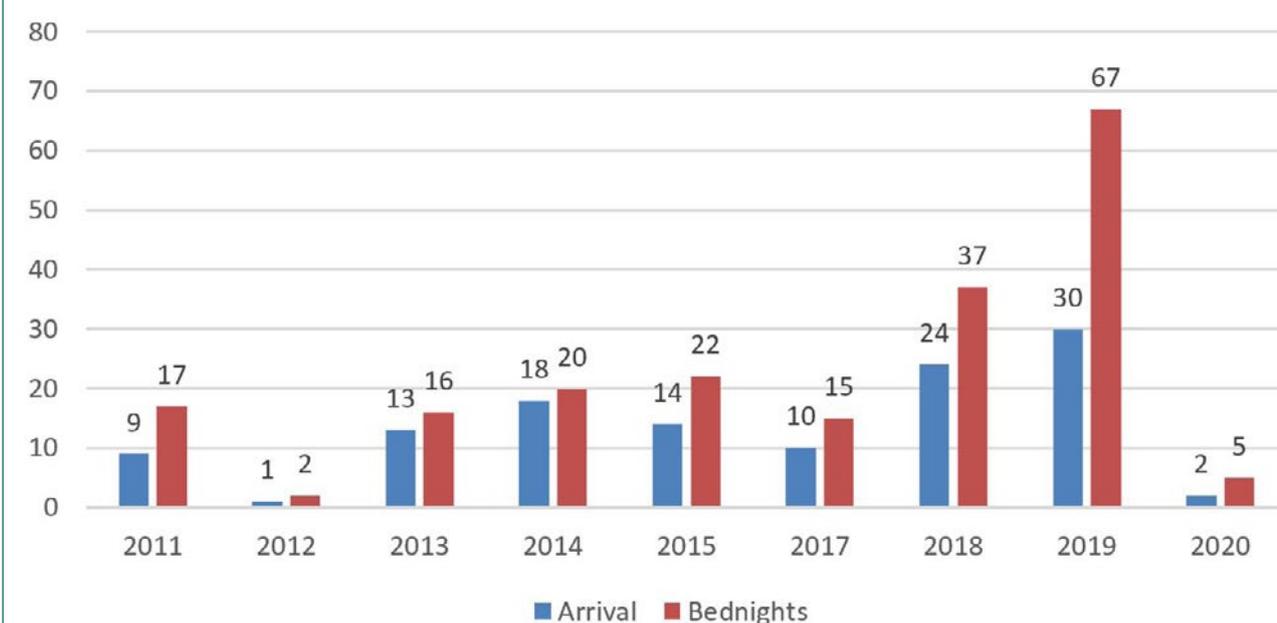


Figure 10: Tourism arrival and bednights record in Dagana

According to the tourism establishment census carried out in 2021, there are no star-rated hotels in Dagana, except for seven budget hotels established in different parts of the district. Although there are about 21 homestays supported by the Dzongkhag administration and the TCB in Tseza Gewog, none of them have been registered. However, the TCB's tourism establishments 2021 still mention that the Dzongkhag earned about Nu.35.78 million from tourists.

### 4.3.2 Tourism amenities in the Dzongkhag

| Amenities               | Total | Remarks             |
|-------------------------|-------|---------------------|
| <b>Accommodation</b>    |       |                     |
| Non-TCB certified Hotel | 7     | 8 listed in TRI     |
| <b>Food</b>             |       |                     |
| Restaurant              | 29    |                     |
| <b>Entertainment</b>    |       |                     |
|                         | 2     | Night Club/ Drayang |

### 4.3.3 Popular tourism activities in Dagana

Different places around Dagana seem to have the potential for different kinds of experiences for visitors. Following are some of the tourism activities that are experienced by the domestic and international and regional tourists.

| Activities        | Remarks  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Pilgrimage</b> | Dagana has many historical and cultural sites that are associated with both Buddhist and Hindu culture. There are some unique land formation places in southern parts of the Dzongkhag that have been preserved as religious sites. The sacred sites in Dagana attract domestic visitors from both Buddhist and Hindu culture. |
| <b>Trekking</b>   | The Dagala Trek has gained popularity in recent years among many Bhutanese and foreigners. The Thousand Lakes trek takes about 6 days to walk from Thimphu to Dagana.  |

#### 4.3.4 Places to visit

| Sl. No               | Cultural and Natural sites                      | Accessibility                              | Details  |
|----------------------|---|--|--|
| 1.                   | Daga Trashiyangtse Dzong                        | Accessible by road                         | Lho Darkar Trashiyangtse Dzong was built in 1651 and it is the last Dzong to be built under the command of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The Dzong has a temple with important relics, i.e., a statue of an aged Zhabdrung Rinpoche, a fossilised Dungkar and an extraordinarily long Buffalo Horn. |
| <b>Tsezang Gewog</b> |   |  |  |
| 2.                   | Holy Water of the Trumpet (Dho Dungchen Menchu) | About 15 minutes' walk from the road       | It is believed that a sacred religious trumpet (dungchen) emerged from the cliff. The trumpet is said to have flown from the cave to Dekiling Gompag in Kana Gewog, and is currently found in Chizhi Gampo.  |
| 3.                   | Valley of the Buffalo (Mahe lungma)             | Accessible by road                         | It was where the Chamberlain of the Daga Penlop found a pair of extraordinarily long buffalo horns. One of the horns is a relic displayed at Daga Dzong and the other one was taken to Talo in Punakha.  |
| 4.                   | Shatong Goenpa                                  | 4 kms from the road point                  | Built by Druptshob Shawa Rigpa and it is located above the dzong. It has one of the best views of the dzong and the valley.  |
| 5.                   | Dho Dungkar                                     | About 30 minutes from the road point       | It is believed that a total of seven conch-shells flew from Chochebang. One of the conchs was discovered by Lam Ngawang Samten and it is kept in the dzong as one of the important relics.   |
| <b>Kana Gewog</b>    |   |  |  |
| 6.                   | The Stone Pillar (Dho Nam gi Kaw)               | About one hour walk from Defiling Gompa    | Believed to represent the relics of a 1000 Buddhas, the rock is around 20 meters in the shape of a chair.  |
| 7.                   | The Millstone (Dho Rang thag)                   | About 10 minutes' walk from Dekiling Gompa | It is believed that in the olden times, a demon used to grind people on the millstone and feast on them. It was subjugated by Guru Rinpoche whose thumb and foot print is believed to have been imprinted on the millstone.  |
| 8.                   | Dho Kelpai Goenthaem (self-arisen steps)        | About 15 minutes' walk from Tanajo village | It is believed that the stone will sink down towards the land of Nagas when the time for the period of this eon ends.  |

|                         |   |  |  |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| 9.                      | Zhabdrung's heritage house in Nyindukha | Accessible by road                           | It is also the Daga Penlop's house which was also the home of the 1st speech incarnation of Zhabdrung, Chogley Namgyal. The house is a heritage building that is more than 300 years old. It still treasures the relics of Zhabdrung.  |
| <b>Drujeygang Gewog</b> |   |  |  |
| 10.                     | Footprint of Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal    | Accessible by road                           | The footprint is said to have been left by Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal after spent 15 days in Yongsibji, Drujeygang.   |
| 11.                     | View point                              | Accessible by road                           | View of the Sunkosh and Dagachhu confluence. View of Tsirang from Rangthaling and Barshong side. Closest view is of the Toesang and Balwani.   |
| <b>Tsangkha Gewog</b>   |   |  |  |
| 12.                     | Tsangkha Tsho                           | Accessible by road                           | The lake is believed to be guarded by a Tshomon (mermaid) who was subjugated by Guru Rinpoche. The locals make daily offerings and prayers to appease her. The lake is believed to have shrunken in size.  |
| 13.                     | Tsangkha Lhakhang                       | Accessible by road                           | This temple was originally a Sakya monastery which was rebuilt recently. It is located next to Pokhari (lake). En route to Tsangkha Lhakhang, one can also pay a side visit to the lake nearby. It takes about four hours to get there from either Sunkosh bridge or Drujeygang. |
| <b>Lajab Gewog</b>      |   |  |  |
| 14.                     | Thanamkhai Dzong                        | About 3 hrs walk from Burichhu               | The rocky side of the mountain is believed to be a sacred abode of Guru Rinpoche. When he was flying to Gomba Dara in Tsirangtoed, the key to his sacred place fell into the Tajilung. A bell could be seen hanging from the rock.   |
| 15.                     | Zhabjeythang                            |  | There is a footprint of Guru Rinpoche on the rock.   |
| 16.                     | View point                              |  | Mirgula Pong Mountain to view of India border  |
| <b>Tashiding Gewog</b>  |   |  |  |
| 17.                     | Ranga Ney                               | 1 hour walk from Deorali                     | A rock cave formation that the locals also call as the Maha Devi Dham which is believed to be Shiva's sacred place. Frequently visited by worshippers from parts of Tsirang and Dagana.  |
| 18.                     | Shamdolep                               | About 6 kilometers away from Tashiding gewog | In Tamang the words <i>Sham</i> means foot and <i>Doley</i> means a flat stone. Interpreted from the belief of Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal leaving his footprint on the stone.   |
| 19.                     | Tamang Lhakhang                         | About 1 hour walk from Sunkosh bridge        | Community temple of the Tamang population living there   |
| <b>Gesarling Gewog</b>  |   |  |  |
| 20.                     | Wangchen Ney                            | 5 minutes walk from the road point.          | This has been a worship place for both Buddhist and Hindu followers. It is believed by Hindu's as the place of lord Shiva. It was also visited and blessed by Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyal.   |

| Goshi Gewog            |                            |  |  |
|------------------------|----------------------------|--|--|
| 21.                    | Jor-Pokheri (Twin lake)-   | It is about 1 hour walk from BPC, Dagapena   | Located in the upper Gozhi. The lake faced risk of drying up, revival work was done by the community by removing debris and invasive weeds from the lakes.                               |
| 22.                    | Dungkar Tsho or Haree lake |  | Lake in Dogak chiwog. Named as the lake is in the shape of a conch shell, or Haree in the southern dialect as it is container-shaped.  |
| 23.                    | Sadhu Kuti (Gomchen Ney)   | About 6 minutes' walk from the Dungkar lake. | It was the meditation site of an Hindu hermit who used to take care of the Dungkar tsho.   |
| Karmaling Gewog        |                            |  |  |
| 24.                    | Khaniwshree/ Dorjiphu Ney  |  | This holy place is a cave formation and it is located above Dorjiphu village under Karmaling Gewog. It is revived and developed as on of the hiking sites under Tourism Flagship Program |
| Lhamoizingkha Dungkhag |                            |  |  |
| 25.                    | Lhamoi Latsho              | 3 hours walk from Dungkhag office            | It is also known as Kalikhola (lake of the Kali) to the Hindu locals.  |
| 26.                    | Lama Laminee               |  | Natural Salt Lick formation creates a unique land feature crafted mountain slope.  |

#### 4.3.5 Tourism trails in Dagana

There are several trails which lead to many of the cultural and natural sites listed above. Following are a few of the trails that already exist and few are proposed to be improved/ developed for tourism attractions and services.

| Sl. | Trail   | Remarks  |
|-----|---|--|
| 1.  | Dagala 1000 Lakes Trek                            | Trek is for about 6 days with an upcoming new alternative route from Khejo since Kunga campsite has been washed away by landslide. It is an old highway used by the Daga Penlop when traveling to Thimphu. Ruins of his guesthouse can be seen along the way. Dagala is believed to be the mountain goddess who overlooks the lakes besides having numerous lakes which are not yet been discovered. |
| 2.  | Dorjiphu trek                                     | Homa Dovan-Karmaling Top (6KM)<br>Khaniwshree Ney (2KM from Dorjiphu Village)<br>Suitable to include activities such as fly fishing, bird watching, butterfly watching & wildlife animal watching.   |
| 3.  | Bird Watching trail around Lhamoi Latsho          | Small natural trail/footpath around the lake site  |
| 4.  | Birdwatching around Lama Laminee                  | Walk around the natural saltlick site and also enjoy the unique landscape of the landmark.   |
| 5.  | Bird Watching along Tshangtshangi/Devitar Village | More than 200 bird species identified and listed.  |

|    |                             |  |
|----|-----------------------------|--|
| 6. | Dorona to Karmaling         | beautiful views of several locations including Alipoor, India, and Chukha dzongkhag. |
| 7. | Nyindukha to Karmaling      |  |
| 8. | Drujeygang-Tsangkha-Burichu |  |

#### 4.3.6 Local crafts

- » Tshar-zo (Bamboo crafting).
- » Ashani (weaving fabric from wool).
- » Gundri and Pera-weaving out of hay and local products
- » Weaving of Gho and kira
- » Yathra weaving (Goshi)
- » Bamboo traditional basket
- » Baello (bamboo hat) weaving
- » Handbag type basket weaving
- » Desho paper making
- » Pira can be also made from maize plant
- » Sickle making (Tashiding)
- » Weaving of Dala (sieve), Marchang net and bamboo basket

#### 4.3.7 Local Food Culture

- » Kheer (Rice porridge) - made from local rice and milk.
- » Pablo-maize product (young corn sliced, grounded and pulped and wrapped in the banana leaves and finally baked in the charcoal to be eaten as pancakes).
- » Sel-roti- dish made from rice flour, maida, atta and other sweet items.
- » Kharang (yellow rice grains)-sharcopa's specialty
- » Milk churner (Lajab gewog)
- » Bamboo bow and arrow (Lajab gewog)
- » Ploughing tools (Lajab gewog)
- » Traditional Bhutanese painting (Lajab gewog)

### 4.3.8 Events/calendar

| Traditional month   | 11   | 12   | 1    | 2     | 3   | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   |
|---|------|------|------|-------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Activities during the year  | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | April | May | June | July | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
| Weather   |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>CULTURE</b>  |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Changla Thoenthay   |      |      |      |       |     |      |      | *    |      |      |      |      |
| Rice harvest (Babshay Babshay Yang Babshay)   |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      | *    | *    |
| Londa celebration in Lajab gewog  |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      | *    | *    |
| Annual Lam kencho ritual  | *    |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      | *    | *    |
| Soekha (Jomo soelni) by the Khengpa settlement  |      |      | *    |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Truelchoe   |      |      | *    |       |     |      |      | *    |      |      |      |      |
| Women Khuru tournament  |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Sakrati festival  |      | *    |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Lhotsham marriage   | *    | *    |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      | *    |
| Durga Pooja (Dasai) and Deepawali   |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      | *    |      |      |      |
| Kirat Chaprung-Drum   | *    |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      | *    | *    | *    |
| Tikar celebration   |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      | *    |      |
| Mahakar Saugrati (where all the people take bath in the early morning and eat wild potatoes)  |      |      |      | *     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Devi and Sanchari Puja  |      |      | *    |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>AGRICULTURE</b>  |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Daro- made from rice and millet flour (Dengo)</li> <li>2. Wachepa-fried chicken with fried feathers dish.</li> <li>3. Dhai chewra- Lotshampa traditional food</li> <li>4. Local bangchang and ara (local beverages)</li> <li>5. Gundruk and shinki.</li> <li>6. Tengma (cornflakes)-made from locally produced maize.</li> <li>7. Brangjey –flat needle.</li> <li>8. Every dish and people of around 16 dzongkhags of Bhutan can be found in Gozhi gewog except the dish from Thimphu, Samtse, Sarpang and Gasa are not found</li> <li>9. Thub rakrok (Nindukha in Kana)</li> <li>10. Jangja (Lhaling and Nindukha in Kana)</li> <li>11. Zaw Boggay (Nindukha in Kana)</li> <li>12. Tongba from fermented millet</li> <li>13. Roasted maize flakes/ Tengma</li> <li>14. Putaka (honey)</li> </ol> |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |

|                                  |   |   |   |   |  |   |   |   |  |  |   |   |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|--|--|---|---|
| Land preparation for cultivation |   | * | * |   |  |   |   |   |  |  |   |   |
| Sow Rice Seeds                   |   |   | * | * |  |   |   |   |  |  |   |   |
| Annual Ritual                    | * | * |   |   |  |   |   |   |  |  |   | * |
| Paddy cultivation                |   |   |   |   |  | * | * | * |  |  |   |   |
| Weeding of paddy fields          |   |   |   |   |  |   | * |   |  |  |   |   |
| Grass cutting in paddy fields    |   |   |   |   |  |   |   | * |  |  |   |   |
| Rice Harvest                     |   |   |   |   |  |   |   |   |  |  | * | * |

#### 4.4 CBET feasibility and prospects

There is strong cultural diversity and rich biodiversity that have the potential to attract visitors provided that the dzongkhag has suitable amenities to address tourist needs. Tourism development is still at an emerging stage in Dagana. Although there are several attractions the dzongkhag has not been able to optimize on tourism opportunities. One major limitation is the lack of proper accommodation and service facilities. Presently the dzongkhag has only a few non-stars rated accommodations and no certified village home stays. However, there is strong effort from the Dzongkhag to develop tourism in the Dzongkhag and have made plans to seek support from the tourism flagship program. Based on the dzongkhag and field consultations the SWOT analysis provided the following findings.

##### 4.4.1 SWOT analysis of CBET in Dagana

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>STRENGTH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Significance of the Daga Tashiyangtse Dzong.</li> <li>» Significant cultural sites in most parts of the Dzongkhag.</li> <li>» Largely rural landscape setting and traditional livelihood practices.</li> <li>» Strong interest among the community, especially the youth to participate in CBET.</li> <li>» Beautiful natural land formation sites that are unique to most places in Bhutan.</li> <li>» Success of Daga farm festival</li> <li>» Pilgrimage tours already promoted under Druk Kora by TCB</li> </ul> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEAKNESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Poor condition of farm roads.</li> <li>» Lack of awareness and understanding of the local people on CBET.</li> <li>» Lack of local capacity and relevant infrastructure to cater tourism products and services.</li> <li>» Seasonality of the road conditions.</li> <li>» Lack of a marketing platform for local products.</li> </ul> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Suitable for culture based as well as agro-based ecotourism development.</li> <li>» Promote pilgrim and adventure tours among domestic tourists.</li> <li>» Have potential to develop homestays and tented resorts or eco-camping.</li> <li>» Developing bird watching, wildlife watching, agro-tourism, fly-fishing, hiking and biking tours.</li> <li>» Create Changche-Tsirang-Dagana tourism circuit</li> </ul>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» The possibility of the Sunkosh hydropower project.</li> <li>» Sensitivity of the southern border areas.</li> </ul>   |

#### 4.4.2 Challenges and issues

- » Waste management issues, especially at the holy sites created by worship offerings.
- » Few of the upcoming homestays lack the capacity to provide an authentic and traditional homestay experience.
- » Although there is a growing demand for local bamboo and cane products, there is a lack of interest among youths to inherit the traditional skills from elders in the community. i.e., issue of Dorona gewog
- » Proximity of the southern part to the Indian border might prove challenging for tourism approval. i.e., Similarity with challenges of tourism in parts of Chukha.
- » Lack of sufficient incentive to conserve heritage sites.

#### 4.4.3 Existing plans to promote tourism development

- » There is already a plan and budget drafted and proposed for the tourism flagship project. Unfortunately, the support was declined by the TCB and the Dzongkhag is looking at another source of funding to implement the plan. The following are the only existing plans that include tourism development initiatives:
  - » Develop & promote Bird Watching tour in Dagana
  - » Lamai Latsho/Khurul Lake
  - » Lama Laminee
  - » Tshangtshangi (Tititar)
  - » Develop Dorjiphu trek (Dagana) with restroom facility
  - » Homa Dovan-Karmaling Top (6KM)
  - » Khaniwshree Ney (2KM from Dorjiphu Village)
  - » Develop river rafting infrastructure with restroom from Tsendagang to Karmaling
  - » Baragumti Put In Site
  - » Kumar Tar Put Out Site
  - » Develop Dagala trek (Tseza, Dagana jurisdiction only)
  - » Develop culture trek (Drujeygang-Tsangkha-Burichu)
  - » Develop Visitor Information Centre (VIC) at Dzongkhag HQ

#### 4.4.4 Recommendations from the locals

- » Most trails leading to the holy site from the road point need to be improved.
- » Place signages and information boards about the sites/ landmarks.
- » Baramurti village below Daga Chu has a high potential for tourism because it is home to a variety of animals and flora.
- » Given the rich biodiversity of Dagana, suggestions about the possibility of creating a book like "Birds of Dagana," "Plants of Dagana," and "Butterfly of Dagana."

- » Construct a viewpoint at Deorali. Provides views of Assam and Lhamoizinkha. The place has rich flora, fauna and birdlife.
- » Support toilet facilities in some of the heritage sites, eg. The Zhabdrung's heritage home in Nindukha.
- » Undertake promotion and branding of Dzongkhag (Brand and Logo, marketing strategy)
- » Provide various skill-based training in tourism and hospitality
- » Provide training on CBT and VHS management

#### **4.4.5 Feasible activities for implementation**

##### ***Product and services development***

- » Identify and support potential homestay development (Tsangkha Gewog, Drujeygang gewog)
- » Support improvement of amenities in heritage sites
- » Enhance development of local craft products
- » Develop eco-culture trek (Drujeygang-Tsangkha-Burichu)
- » Develop agro/ farm-based activities

##### ***Capacity development***

- » Training on Homestay operators in hospitality and food services
- » Training local community and youths in diversifying local crafts production
- » Enhance community understanding and participation in CBET approaches
- » Train CBET community in entrepreneurship management and marketing

##### ***Marketing***

- » Develop and document CBET promotional
- » Collaborate with the ABTO to revamp the [www.communitytourism.bt](http://www.communitytourism.bt) website using SEO tools.

# 5. Trongsa Dzongkhag

## 5.1 Dzongkhag background

Trongsa dzongkhag lies in the central part of the country and shares its borders with Bumthang, Zhemgang, Sarpang, and Wangduephodrang. The dzongkhag covers an area of about 1807 km<sup>2</sup> and it is administratively divided into five gewogs. The altitude ranges from 800 – 4800 meters. Major part of the Dzongkhag falls in the environmentally protected zone while a few parts of the north falls within the Wangchuck Centennial Park, most of it falls within the Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park. The population of the Dzongkhag stands at 19,960 as per 2017 census records.

## 5.2 Status of the White-bellied Heron along the habitats in Trongsa

The WBH habitat extends to three gewogs of the dzongkhag. These are Drakten, Langthil and Korphu gewogs. Its habitat is mainly along the Mangdechhu river and its tributaries.

## 5.3 Tourism in Trongsa

### 5.3.1 Tourism arrival record

Tourism in Trongsa has mostly been associated with tourism in Bumthang. Although Trongsa can also be a significant tourism destination, it has not been able to attract many of the visitors travelling to the next dzongkhag. Trongsa has been significant in the history of Bhutan as it was the site of the Trongsa Penlop who ruled the eastern regions of the country. Trongsa offers a diversity of tourist attractions that are cultural and nature-based. These include hiking trails, river rafting, bird watching, biking trails, cultural sites and events. Based on the tourism statistics, the number of tourists visiting Trongsa has been declining, from a total of 6,454 visitors in 2011, and the number of visitors has declined to 5364 in 2019.



Figure 11: Tourism arrival and bednights record in Trongsa

If suitable products and amenities are developed, Trongsa has the advantage to attract the majority of the tourists visiting Bumthang and those entering Bhutan from the Gelephu side. As per records from TCB Trongsa has only one three-star registered hotel, 5 non-star hotels, and 38 restaurants. There is only one village homestay in Nubi gewog.

### 5.3.2 Tourism amenities in the Dzongkhag

| Amenities                  | Total | Remarks          |
|----------------------------|-------|------------------|
| <b>Accommodation</b>       |       |                  |
| TCB certified Hotel-3 star | 1     |                  |
| Non-TCB certified Hotel    | 5     | 11 in TRI        |
| VHS                        | 1     | In Nubi gewog    |
| <b>Food</b>                |       |                  |
| Restaurant                 | 38    |                  |
| Coffee Shop/Cafeteria      | 1     |                  |
| <b>Entertainment</b>       |       |                  |
|                            | 3     | Karaoke/ Drayang |

### 5.3.3 Popular tourism activities in Trongsa

Trongsa Dzong had been the headquarters for eastern region and had been the seat of Trongsa Penlop. Even today, the formal investiture of the crown Prince of Bhutan as the Trongsa Penlop is observed in this Dzong. The Dzongkhag also has rich cultural and natural diversities that attract visitors. Following are some of the tourism activities that are experienced by the domestic and international and regional tourists.

| Activities                  | Remarks  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Birdwatching</b>         | There are many birding sites suitable for birdwatching.  |
| <b>Cultural experience</b>  | Visit to the Dzong, the Ta Dzong Museum, palaces and Trongsa Tshechu. Visit the Monpa communities.   |
| <b>Pilgrimage</b>           | There are many sacred places within and around the Dzongkhag. Some of the sacred sites that are associated with Guru Rinpoche and the Peling lineage.  |
| <b>Rafting and Kayaking</b> | Rafting and Kayaking has been introduced along the Mangdechhu stretch below the Yundrupcholing village. Although the villagers have not benefited from tourism in the area, there is potential for product and services diversification.   |
| <b>Trekking</b>             | Here are trails that connect different villages and cultural/ natural sites within and outside the Dzongkhag. One of the popular ones is the Nabji Korphu trail, which was one of the first community-based ecotourism implemented by the TCB in partnership with the JSWNP, ABTO with support from SNV. It promotes visitation to some of the most remote places in Bhutan that belong to the indigenous Monpa community. However, parts of the trail have declined due to the emergence of roads connecting these communities. |

### 5.3.4 Places to visit

| Sl. No | Cultural and Natural sites | Accessibility                            | Details  |
|--------|----------------------------|--|--|
| 1.     | Trongsa Dzong              | Few minutes' walk from the Dzong parking | The dzong was the most coveted and powerful seat among the Penlops in Bhutan. It has power over central and eastern Bhutan and the vanguard of the warriors.   |
| 2.     | Ta Dzong Museum            | Accessible by road                       | It was built by Chogyal Minjur Tempa, the 1st Governor of Trongsa in 1652. The watchtower once guarded Trongsa Dzong against internal rebellion. It stands on a promontory above the town. It is converted into a museum that displays the art and relics of old Bhutan. |
| 3.     | Thruempang Palace          | Accessible by road                       | It was built by the second king and the birthplace of the third king.  |

|                       |                             |  |   |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|
| 4.                    | Chendebji Chorten           | Accessible by road   | Enroute to Trongsa, the stupa was built in the 18th century and is patterned after Kathmandu's Swayambhunath Stupa.   |
| 5.                    | Tsheringma Drupchhu         | Accessible by road   | A small spring located at Tangsibji village is considered the holy water of goddess Tsheringma. It is believed that the good singing voice of the people in Tangsibji are blessed from drinking this water.     |
| <b>Langthel Gewog</b> |                             |  |   |
| 6.                    | Yundrupcholing Palace       | Accessible by road   | Built by Trongsa Penlop Ugyen Phuntsho around 1839. It was restored in 1897 by the first King Gongsa Ugyen Wangchuck. A monastic institution has been established there.  |
| 7.                    | Pottery centre at Jangbi    | Accessible by road   | Established with support from Tarayana, the pots are made by people from Jangbi.  |
| 8.                    | Hot spring in Phumzur       |  |   |
| <b>Korphu Gewog</b>   |                             |  |   |
| 9.                    | Lhendup Chodarling Lhakhang | An hour drive from Riwo Tala   | Founded in the 16th century by Trulku Chogden Gonpo, reincarnation of Tertön Dorji Lingpa.  |
| 10.                   | Nabje Lhakhang              | Accessible by road. Also, a half and hour walk up from Nabji school. | Built in the 8 <sup>th</sup> century by Khandum Tashi Kheuden. Inside the lhakhang, there is a stone monolith with thumb prints of Gurur, Kinga Sindhu Raja and Nabudara to ensure peace between the two kings. |
| <b>Drakten Gewog</b>  |                             |  |   |
| 11.                   | Kuengarabten Palace         | Accessible by road   | It was built by the second king in 1929 and served as the winter Royal Palace. The Dzong is currently used as a monastic school by Trongsa Rabdey.  |
| 12.                   | Rayphel Lhakhang            | About 10 minutes' walk from Samcholing MS School                     | Built in 8 <sup>th</sup> century by Guru Rinpoche on the request of his consort Monbum Tashi Khui Drangas   |
| 13.                   | Samcholing Palace           | An hour and half drive from the highway                              | The palace was converted to lhakhang by the Gyalyum Pema Dechen, Queen to the 2 <sup>nd</sup> king. It was the winter residence of the royal family from the 1950s.   |
| 14.                   | Green tea production centre | Accessible by road   | Operated and managed by the Samcholing women group.   |

### 5.3.5 Tourism trails in Trongsa

There are several trails that lead to many of the cultural and natural sites listed above. Following are a few of the trails that already exist and few are proposed to be improved/ developed for tourism attractions and services.

- » Nabji Korphu Trail
- » Sheling-Wamling-Jangbi
- » Black mountain trekking
- » Heritage Palace Route

### 5.3.6 Local crafts

- » Monpa Yoezer Tshogpa-basket weaving, laptop bags, bamboo or cane mats (Jechap/Dechap)
- » Nettle weaving-Jangbi and Yuendrungcholing)
- » Pottery (Tongphey-SHG) and (Dangdung-individual)

### 5.3.7 Local food culture

- » Tsankali (rice crackers) in Namther and Dangdung
- » Branjey (mengay)
- » Khuley
- » Orchids
- » Wild potato
- » Ara making

### 5.3.8 Events/calendar

| Traditional month          | 11   | 12   | 1    | 2     | 3   | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   |
|----------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Activities during the year | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | April | May | June | July | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
| Weather                    |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>CULTURE</b>             |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Traongsa Tshechu           | *    |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      | *    |

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pelden Lhamoi<br>Drupchen/ Festival of<br>Mahakali  |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Yeshey Goenpoi<br>Drupchen/ Festival of<br>Mahakala |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * | * |   |
| Monpa Festival                                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Yundrocholing tshechu                               | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Nabji Drup  | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Korphu Drup   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Takla Chotpa(only at<br>Korphu)                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |
| Baipala   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Ngipa Tsechu(only at<br>Nimshong Chiwogs)           |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Duiduila  |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Lam (only at Korphu)                                |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Tenwang-taktsin                                     |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Goem Kangchoe (only<br>at Nimshong)                 |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Dangpa Ngungney(only<br>at Ninshong)                |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Shilag dung festival                                | * | * |   |   |   | * | * |   |   |   |   |   |
| Lama Koencho/<br>Choesung                           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * | * |   |
| Lochoe  | * | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>AGRICULTURE</b>                                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Land preparation for<br>cultivation                 |   |   | * | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Sow Rice Seeds                                      |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Paddy cultivation                                   |   |   |   |   |   | * | * |   |   |   |   |   |
| Rice Harvest  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * | * |   |   |   |
| Wild potato ('Chi')<br>harvest                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |

## 5.4 CBET feasibility and prospects

### 5.4.1 SWOT analysis of CBET in Trongsa

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>STRENGTH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Rich biodiversity and cultural heritage</li> <li>» Unique indigenous culture of the Monpas</li> <li>» Significance of Trongsa in the history of Bhutan.</li> <li>» Accessibility to rich cultural and natural heritage sites</li> <li>» Good climatic conditions</li> </ul> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEAKNESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Trongsa has become a transit for tourists travelling to Bumthang.</li> <li>» Lack of awareness and understanding of the local people on tourism development.</li> <li>» Lack of capacity and infrastructure to cater to tourism services and development.</li> <li>» Lack of collectivism mindset and practice among most people for community growth.</li> </ul> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Connectivity and tourism circuit with east and south.</li> <li>» Birding watching and wildlife viewing (golden langur).</li> <li>» Promote heritage palace tour</li> </ul>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Road widening activities causing disturbance to WBH habitat sites.</li> <li>» Constructions and activities of MHPA project.</li> <li>» Losing indigenous language, culture and tradition, i.e., the Olep language of the Monpa.</li> </ul>   |

### 5.4.2 Challenges and issues

- » Trongsa has not been able to compete with Bumthang in terms of tourism visitation.
- » Tourism is promising in the area, but management is a significant issue.
- » Lack of financial support to develop CBET products.
- » Tourism activities and amenities are mostly concentrated along the highway towards Bumthang
- » Lack of awareness among communities to invest in tourism.
- » Lack of community vision toward a common goal in tourism (lessons from Nabji Korphu trail).

### 5.4.3 Existing plans to promote tourism development

The Dzongkhag and the gewogs are keen to promote Trongsa as a destination and not as a bypass experience for visitors. Besides the attempt to develop and promote the Nabji Korphu Trail, there hasn't been much research done to promote tourism in other parts of Trongsa. The Dzongkhag is looking forward to conducting detailed research on the potential of tourism in Trongsa. The following are the expectations to develop some of the tourism products in the district:

- » Tour of the heritage palaces in Trongsa (Thruempang Palace, Keunga rabten palace, Yundrongcholing Palace, and Samdrupcholing Palace).
- » Exploration of orchids in the wild as a part of ecotourism activities, one such orchid is the 'ladies slipper'.

- » Black mountain trekking
- » Studying the potentials of the Black Mountain trekking route
- » Enhance Jangbi to Nabji trek

#### **5.4.4 Recommendations from the locals**

- » Homestay development in Yundrupchholing
- » Financial support to develop homestay development and diversification of tourism activities in Korphu gewog
- » Promote the terchham as a unique cultural tourism product.
- » Explore the possibility of reviving some of the campsites along the Nabji Korphu trail undisturbed by road connectivity.
- » Raise awareness and educate community members to modify their old mindsets.
- » Provide training on CBT product development and hospitality services.

#### **5.4.5 Feasible activities for implementation**

##### ***Product and services development***

- » Identify and support potential homestay development (Yundrupchholing in Langthil gewog)
- » Training of local guides
- » Restore the community campsite and its management in Nabji-Korphu
- » Develop and promote local textile and craft products
- » Reviving parts of the campsites along the Nabji Korphu trail

##### ***Capacity development***

- » Training on Homestay operators in hospitality and food services
- » Train local CBET group members in enterprise, campsite management and marketing skills
- » Train local guides
- » Enhance community understanding and participation in CBET approaches

##### ***Marketing***

- » Develop and document CBET promotional
- » Collaborate with the ABTO to revamp the [www.communitytourism.bt](http://www.communitytourism.bt) website using SEO tools.

# 6. Zhemgang Dzongkhag

## 6.1 Dzongkhag background

The Zhemgang dzongkhag lies in the central south part of the country and shares its borders with Bumthang, Trongsa, Sarpang, and Mongar. Traditionally the Dzongkhag has been divided as the Khengrignam Sum (Upper Kheng, Middle Kheng and Lower Kheng). The dzongkhag covers an area of about 2411 km<sup>2</sup> and it is administratively divided into 8 gewogs. The altitude ranges from 100 – 4500 meters. Broadleaf is the dominant forest type in the Dzongkhag. The dzongkhag also falls within three national parks, Royal Manas National Park, Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park, and Thrumshingla National Park. The population of the Dzongkhag stands at 17,763 as per 2017 census records.

## 6.2 Status of the White-bellied Heron along the habitats in Zhemgang

The WBH habitat extends to eight gewogs of the dzongkhag. These are Nangkor, Trong, and Phangkar gewogs. Its habitat is mainly along the Mangdechhu river and its tributaries. One of the most prominent habitats are along the Bertichhu area, Yangdigang to Goling end, and Tingtibi bridge to Gurchime. However, these areas are also facing threats from various anthropogenic activities.

## 6.3 Tourism in Zhemgang

### 6.3.1 Tourism arrival record

The richness of Zhemgang in comparison to most of the dzongkhags in Bhutan in terms of natural resources, culture and wildlife, therefore, make it a very suitable tourist destination. However, the Dzongkhag still receives fewer tourists compared to the rest of the places in central Bhutan. In 2019 Zhemgang received only 346 guests, but the tourism data shows that the number of tourists in Zhemgang has been increasing.

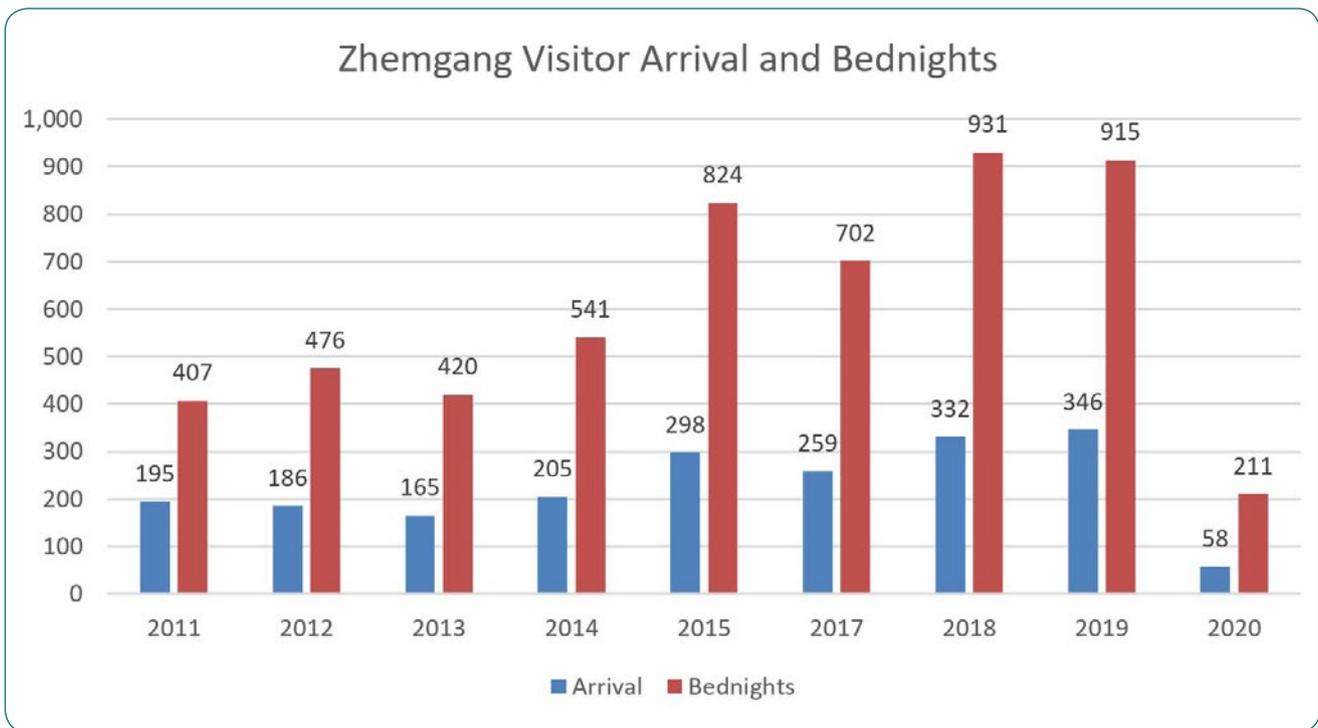


Figure 12: Tourism arrival and bednights record in Zhemgang

One of the drawbacks is the lack of the suitable tourism amenities such as accommodation and food. According to the TCB establishment report 2021, Zhemgang has no tourist standard hotel, there are only 3 registered Village Home stays, 5 non star hotels, and 35 restaurants.

### 6.3.2 Tourism amenities in the Dzongkhag

| Amenities               | Total | Remarks   |
|-------------------------|-------|-----------|
| <b>Accommodation</b>    |       |           |
| Non-TCB certified Hotel | 5     | 12 in TRI |
| Campground              | 3     |           |
| VHS                     | 2     | 4 in TRI  |
| <b>Food</b>             |       |           |
| Restaurant              | 35    |           |

Source: Tourism Establishment Census of Bhutan 2021 and TRI

### 6.3.3 Popular tourism activities in Zhemgang

The Zhemgang Dzongkhag Administration has already studied the potential of tourism in the district and has made efforts to invest in tourism diversification and product development. Given its richness in culture, nature and wildlife, there are big potentials to invest in suitable amenities and infrastructures. There are different tour programs that have been packaged with different themes and sites. The tourism activities that are currently promoted are as follows.

| Packages                        | Remarks  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>White-bellied Heron Tour</b> | <p>7 nights and 8 days tour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Bird watching: not just the WBH but also numerous other rare, endemic species</li> <li>» Excursion in Manas National Park, considered a conservation showpiece</li> <li>» Dip in hot spring or undertake white water rafting</li> <li>» Sample local dish made from bamboo shoots and wild yam</li> <li>» Village life and culture</li> </ul> |
| <b>Orchid Tour</b>              | <p>5 nights and 6 days tour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Numerous orchid species enroute</li> <li>» Berti Botanical Garden tour</li> <li>» Temples, monuments and heritage sites</li> <li>» A haven of wildlife, including endangered Golden Langur &amp; White-bellied Heron</li> <li>» Village customs and traditions</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Golden Langur Tour</b>       | <p>5 nights and 6 days tour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Hiking along Golden langur trail: Berti, Tama-Tingtibi-Tshanglajong</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Kharphu Festival Tour</b>    | <p>8 night and 9 days tour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Experience village homestays</li> <li>» Participate in local Festival (Shinghar-Bardo: Bardo festival)</li> <li>» Sightseeing and hiking in Bardo</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Craft Village Tour</b>       | <p>5 night and 6 days tour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Panbang-Bjoka Bamboo Craft Village tour</li> <li>» Bjoka-Panbang; Manas Park excursion</li> </ul>  |

### 6.3.4 Places to visit

| Sl. No               | Cultural and Natural sites     | Accessibility                         | Details  |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1.                   | Zhemgang Dzong                 | Accessible by road                    | It is historically the most significant and the oldest religious structure in the Dzongkhag. Lama Zhang Dorje Drakpa, a great Buddhist saint, built a hermitage at the site in 1163 AD and, in 1655, a small Dzong was built symbolizing the unification of the three Divisions of Kheng. The Dzong was renovated by the Third King of Bhutan in 1963. |
| 2.                   | House of Bjoka Khoche          | Accessible by road                    | It is a huge stone house that belonged to a southern chief that exercised authority the Kheng, parts of Assam and neighbouring Pemagatshel and Mongar Dzongkhags.  |
| <b>Trong Gewog</b>   |                                |                                       |  |
| 3.                   | Trong Heritage Village         | Accessible by road                    | An old village that has been preserved by the government. The village displays the refined skill of stone works of olden days that has remained strong and sturdy through many years. There are 27 two-storey traditional stone houses with wooden windows and shutters.   |
| 4.                   | Tangma Lhakhang                | Accessible by road                    | Significantly known to be the place where Terton Pema Lingpa's body after his death was secretly preserved.  |
| 5.                   | Bermo Botanical Garden         | Accessible by road                    | The garden displays varieties of orchids found in Zhemgang.  |
| 6.                   | Agriculture product outlet     | Accessible by road                    | Sells local agriculture products of Zhemgang.  |
| 7.                   | Cane and bamboo product outlet | Accessible by road                    | Situated in Zhemgang town. Sell a variety of cane and bamboo products brought in from different parts of Zhemgang.   |
| <b>Nangkor Gewog</b> |                                |                                       |  |
| 8.                   | Tali Dratshang                 | 2 and half hours drive from Zhemgang. | Built as a structure resembling Zangtopelri  |
| 9.                   | Bhar Lhakhang                  | Accessible by road                    | Constructed by Lam Sonam Gyaltshen, the reincarnation of Kathog Chhoeying Rangdroel at a spiritual site where Pema Lingpa met Guru Rinpoche.   |
| 10.                  | Buli Dechen Choling temple     | Accessible by road                    | Founded by the great treasure-discover Terton Dorje Lingpa. The old temple was dismantled and a new one in 1966 by the Buli community.   |
| 11.                  | Buli Tsho                      | 10 minutes walk from the car park     | Undisturbed lake that has been preserved by the community as the abode of the Manmo (lake goddess)   |
| 12.                  | Post harvest centre in Goling  | Accessible by road                    | Focuses on diversifying vegetable and fruit products, i.e., banana, turmeric, etc.   |

| Phangkar Gewog |                       |   |  |
|----------------|-----------------------|---|--|
| 13.            | Mamung Trong Lhakhang | About 6km farm road drive from Pantang  | Built to contain leprosy which was once quite widespread in the area, and to provide a venue for the local community to perform religious functions. |
| 14.            | Panhang Lhakhang      | Few meters above Panbang-Gomphu highway | It was built by the villagers as a communal place for organising religious, social, and any cultural events.   |

### 6.3.5 Tourism trails in Zhemgang

Some of the existing and recommended trails are listed below:

| Sl. | Trail                                  | Remarks  |
|-----|--|--|
| 1.  | Tingtibi town to Berti village         | The trail would give a pleasant experience of birdwatching and butterfly watching. There are farms along the way and a natural pool with fishes near the campsite. |
| 2.  | Berti-Tama orchid trail                |  |
| 3.  | Golden Langur trail                    | Includes visit along Berti, Tama, Tingtibi and Tshonglajong village  |
| 4.  | Berti campsite to Botanical Park trail |  |

### 6.3.6 Local crafts

The people of Kheng are skilled in bamboo and cane craft as well as adept potters and their earthenware products were highly prized throughout the country in the past. Among the Kheng people, the community of Bjokha is the most expert and they can weave a variety of about 40 cane and bamboo products. The following are the list of craft products that are produced by the community.

| Sl. No. | Products  |
|---------|---|
| 1.      | Bichap  |
| 2.      | <i>Tsizib/ Zem</i> : basket to store dried meat and food items, and often used as a carry basket                      |
| 3.      | <i>Lakchung</i> : a small-sized fruit basket to serve dried fruits on special occasion and ceremonies                 |
| 4.      | <i>Beykur</i> : a small square-shaped basket used to store yarns, or used as a gift box                               |
| 5.      | <i>Bangchung</i> : a pair of round containers used as a rice bowl, or to carry pack lunches, and also to serve snacks |
| 6.      | <i>Bello</i> : sun hat  |
| 7.      | <i>Poedung</i> : a slender cylindrical container to store incense sticks  |
| 8.      | <i>Bechab</i> : a rectangular-shaped platter with one side slightly curved to winnow or de-husk rice                  |
| 9.      | <i>Pari</i> : large woven mat used to dry grains  |
| 10.     | <i>Soray</i> (quiver): an elongated cylindrical container for arrows  |
| 11.     | <i>Jatsa</i> : butter tea strainer  |

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| 12. | <i>Sipa</i> : a round hollowed container with lid to store butter and cheese |
| 13. | <i>Palang</i> : a cylindrical tube to store alcohol and water.               |
| 14. | Bamboo furnitures (bed, chair, table, cupboard)                              |

### 6.3.7 Local food culture

The people of Zhemgang are proud of the rich food resources they are able to grow as well as the harvest from the forest. They mainly cultivate maize followed by rice, buckwheat, millet, barley, wheat, foxtail millet, potato, etc. Some of the food products that are traditional to the region are listed below.

- » Yeast-Making: made from millet, maize and buckwheat. It is the key ingredient that makes traditional Bhutanese alcoholic drinks such as bangchang, singchang and ara).
- » Runtoh foxtail millet of Zhemgang is usually served with vegetables or ema datsi (chili dish)
- » Raksha Bungba and Bunga Achara: pickled bamboo shoot
- » Dhamroo-Toh: a wild plant *Elatostema linoleum* is chopped into small pieces and then cooked together with rice or millet or ground maize.
- » Tongba: a traditional fermented drink made from millet
- » Tsenden Mam Ara: local alcohol flavoured with red sandalwood
- » Several wildflowers and vegetables such as orchids, fiddlehead, patsha, damroo (wild greens) are also harvested from the forest.
- » Chutan/ dengo: made from millet and maize flour.
- » Khuby/ khule: local pancake made of buckwheat flour.
- » Smoked dry fish from Berti.

### 6.3.8 Events/calendar

| Traditional month                | 11   | 12   | 1    | 2     | 3   | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   |
|----------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Activities during the year       | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | April | May | June | July | Aug. | Sep. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. |
| Weather                          |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>CULTURE</b>                   |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Zhemgang Tshechu                 |      |      |      | *     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Bird Festival                    |      |      |      |       |     |      |      |      |      |      | *    |      |
| Kharphu Lhasol                   |      |      |      | *     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Prewchoed (Tali/Buli in Nangkor) |      |      |      | *     |     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |

|                                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dhumati Tshechu                      |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Derchoed (Bjokha Trong)              |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |
| A-Hoi Bonchoed (Bjokha Trong)        |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |
| Dongdorla Duechod (Bjokha Trong)     |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |
| Khomshar Karphu                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |
| Khomshar Tshechu                     |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |
| Khomshar Katag                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Panbang Tshechu                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |
| Goshing Tshechu                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Phumithang Tshechu                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Gonphu Tshechu                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Buli Tshechu                         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Bjokha Tshechu                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Mamung Tshechu                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Tashibi Tshechu                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Thrisa Tshechu                       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Bonchoed (Bjokha Trong)              |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Bonchoed (Buli/Tali/Kikhar/Nangkhor) |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Bonchoed (Langdurbi)                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Bardo Kharphu                        |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |
| Wamling Tshechu                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| <b>AGRICULTURE</b>                   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Land preparation for cultivation     |   | * | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Sow Rice Seeds                       |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Annual Ritual                        | * | * |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |
| Paddy cultivation                    |   |   |   |   |   | * | * |   |   |   |   |   |
| Weeding of paddy fields              |   |   |   |   |   |   | * |   |   |   |   |   |
| Rice Harvest                         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | * | * |   |   |   |

## 6.4 CBET feasibility and prospects

The people living within the WBH habitat remain interested in participating in the development of CBET. A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis was conducted.

### 6.4.1 SWOT Analysis of CBET in Zhemgang

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>STRENGTH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Zhemgang tourism included in Tourism Flagship program support as well as the GEF ecotourism projects by TCB.</li> <li>» Documentations of various research for tourism development in the Dzongkhag.</li> <li>» Rich biodiversity and cultural heritage hotspot</li> <li>» Dzongkhag and resident communities are keen to participate and promote CBET.</li> <li>» Availability of potential products such as organic farming, water activities, hiking trails, home stay, hot springs, bird watching.</li> <li>» Accessibility to Rich cultural and natural heritage sites</li> <li>» Good climatic conditions</li> </ul> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEAKNESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Limited tourism infrastructures.</li> <li>» Lack of awareness and understanding of the local people on tourism development.</li> <li>» Lack of capacity and infrastructure to cater to tourism services and development.</li> <li>» Lack of capacity within the implementing agencies to engage collective community participation.</li> <li>» Seasonality of road access in some parts of the Dzongkhag.</li> <li>» Lack of tourism project monitoring and evaluation</li> </ul> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Development of an information centre to direct visitors.</li> <li>» Attract visitors via Gelephu</li> <li>» Have potential to develop homestays and tented resorts or eco-camping.</li> <li>» Availability of active youths and women in the community.</li> <li>» Fly Fishing activities</li> <li>» Diversify local agriculture products</li> </ul>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Increasing activities along the riverside can threaten existing WBH habitats.</li> </ul>   |

### 6.4.2 Challenges and Issues

- » Lack of community cooperation and coordination towards management of tourism facilities.
- » Lack of financial resources to develop tourism products and services.
- » Lack of a marketing platform for local craft products.
- » Lack of creativity and skills among the communities to diversify local agriculture products.

### 6.4.3 Existing plans to promote tourism development

The Zhemgang Dzongkhag have made efforts to develop and promote Zhemgang as one of the must-visit tourist destinations in Bhutan. Despite the wholehearted efforts of the Dzongkhag

administration and the communities, the Dzongkhag faced numerous challenges to be identified as one of the target districts under the Tourism Flagship Program. Nevertheless, the Dzongkhag would be receiving financial support from the TCB to support few of the activities proposed to develop and promote local tourism. Following are the tourism development plans of Zhemgang:

- » Construction of additional infrastructure (store) and site development (Berti White-bellied Heron Camp)
- » Continue the Bird festival with more creative ideas to pave ways for its sustainability.
- » Construction of 8-unit public toilet at Tingtibi BBF ground
- » Construct bird watching tower at Tama and development of camp site and toilets
- » Publish book on Birds of Zhemgang
- » Revival of eco-trail from Berti-Tama (includes construction of toilet and canopy on the way)
- » Training of local bird guides
- » Construction of pedestrian bridge and canopy at Pantang eco-lodge
- » Construction of twin type eco-lodge-2 numbers, Information center-1 number, caretaker quarter-1 number, tents area, parking and landscaping (Anala Eco-lodge)
- » Development and capacity building of VHS and Eco-lodges
- » Awareness program on community-based tourism aspects such as home stays, local product development, group mobilization etc. for local communities
- » Development of take-in and take-out points in Panbang: Construction of footpath, changing room, resting place and toilets in six locations along Mangdechhu, Drangmechhu and Manas
- » Development of river rafting at Tingtibi: Purchase 2 numbers of rafts, 16 numbers of oars and 16 life jackets
- » Development of river rafting at Tingtibi: Capacity building
- » Development of take-in and take-out points in Tingtibi: Construct footpath, changing room, resting place and toilets in three locations along Mangdechhu in Tingtibi
- » Upliftment of the Trong village

The Dzongkhag 12th Five Year Plan also has targeted to revive old eco-trails in and around the Dzongkhag:

- » Dakphel to Buli (Nangkor Gewog)
- » Shingkar Tholay to Khando-Pang, Ura & Shingkar to Thrisa Tsha Chu Drak Nye
- » Gomphu to Subrang
- » Digala, Zhemgang to Nagor, Silambi, Mongar
- » Khomshar, Zhemgang to Wama, Mongar
- » Berti to Tama

- » Dungbi to Dangkhar
- » Buli, Zhemgang to Bumthang Chumey via Brebdung-la

#### **6.4.4 Recommendations from the locals**

- » Support enhancement of the eco camps.
- » recommend solutions for engaging community participation in tourism development.
- » Support some of the activities proposed in the Dzongkhag tourism plan that do not have budget support from the government.
- » Due to the presence of tigers in the Dzongkhag, Zhemgang could be developed as a tiger-spotting destination for residents and visitors in the future.
- » Develop standard guidelines for community members to visit natural and cultural heritage sites.
- » Create excellent homestays with the availability of all the necessary amenities.
- » Develop a guesthouse at the Trong Heritage village.

#### **6.4.5 Feasible activities for implementation**

##### ***Product and services development***

- » Support the restoration of community-managed campsite at Berti
- » Develop birding and butterfly watching trail from Berti to the Botanical Park
- » Develop and promote local textile and craft products
- » Diversify local agriculture and livestock products
- » Revival of eco-trail from Berti-Tama (includes construction of toilet and canopy on the way)

##### ***Capacity development***

- » Training on Homestay operators in hospitality and food services
- » Train local CBET group members in the enterprise, campsite management and marketing skills
- » Training of local guides
- » Enhance community understanding and participation in CBET approaches

##### ***Marketing***

- » Develop and document CBET promotional
- » Collaborate with the ABTO to revamp the [www.communitytourism.bt](http://www.communitytourism.bt) website using SEO tools.

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## Analysis of the findings

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The findings of the study have indicated that all the six Dzongkhags have a strong interest in promoting community-based ecotourism. The potential for its development also exists. The prioritization of the sites is based on few criterions which are explained below. This is not an exhaustive list and other relevant criterias should also be considered.

### ***Criterion 1: Availability of services***

This would include the availability of accommodation, restaurants, and other amenities and facilities that will support visitation. Sites that have more of these services available means that they are in a better position to immediately participate in tourism development. However, even if the services do not exist the potential for their provision needs to be known.

### ***Criterion 2: Accessibility***

Accessibility is an important component in making it possible for visitors to enjoy the sites. Therefore, the ease of access and the condition of roads and trails are important considerations.

### ***Criterion 3: Condition of WBH habitats and sighting opportunities***

One attraction or expectation of visitors could be seeing the WBH. Sites that could offer this opportunity within the safe range where the birds are not disturbed are a good option.

### ***Criterion 4: Availability of youth and community vitality***

To promote community-based ecotourism it is important that there are communities available and interested to participate, especially youth.

### ***Criterion 5: Product diversity and other attractions***

Product diversity and activities will help in stimulating visitor interest. More of the attractions and products means more choices for visitors to engage in.

### ***Criterion 6: Availability of local food products***

The availability and potential of more variety of food products would help the local communities to market their products and at the same time interest visitors.

### ***Criterion 7: Skills and enthusiasm***

Existing skills in traditional handicraft production or any other skills that can add value to tourism development would be an advantage for promoting CBET. Even if skills are not available, demonstrating keenness and enthusiasm to learn can be advantageous.

A preliminary assessment of the six dzongkhags based on the above criterions has shown that the sites in Punakha, Tsirang/Dagana, and Zhemgang qualify as the top three priority areas for developing CBET. However, considering that the objective of its development is to support the conservation of the WBH there is a need to cautiously analyse this intervention. It is important to consider whether CBET is an appropriate option. The plight of the WBH has reached such a critical stage whereby any

further disturbance will only pose an added risk. Pursuing ecotourism or any recreational activity could likely aggravate the total demise of the WBH. Given these circumstances the indications are clear that the development of CBET needs to be approached in a cautious manner.

Therefore, considering the overall status and condition of the WBH habitat it is probably wise to segregate the intervention of introducing CBET under two categories.

1. *Restoration of the habitat:* These areas should not attempt to introduce CBET immediately instead focus on interventions and strategies to minimize the disturbances and damage control. Subsequently, based on how well the situation improves then only CBET could be considered for development.
2. *Development of CBET in feasible sites:* This category will look into areas where there are fewer disturbances and could be feasible for the development of CBET under certain conditions.

# PART - 3

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## The Way Forward

## Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the findings of the study it is recommended that the plan of action is developed under two categories – Restoration of the WBH habitat and development of CBET.

**Restoration of WBH habitat:** This would apply mainly to the WBH habitats in Punakha and Wangduephodrang where historically the number of birds were much higher but now has drastically decreased due to disturbances. Considering this situation, the plan of action to develop CBET should be based on the precondition that the areas/habitats first be restored. Upon achieving this, then only the development of ecotourism should be considered. Some suggestions on the plan of action to restore the habitat would include the following:

- » Creating awareness and education programs to increase people's understanding of the plight of the WBH and build a positive attitude toward conservation resulting in responsible actions to save the WBH from extinction.
- » Analysing the threats and accordingly drawing up specific actions to curb these threats. This would also mean an increase in law enforcement and also application of the principle of non-negotiation where some areas are strictly restricted from all human activities. Under the threats, rafting has emerged as one big concern. Strict regulations and safety guidelines for monitoring the activity on the ground needs to be put into practice.
- » Conduct further research on the WBH. While it may be challenging to revive the habitat in some of the areas due to the inevitable disturbances, alternate areas with less disturbance could be explored. For example, the lake at Adha with abundance of fish could be a potential refuge for the WBH. It is believed that clustered vegetation in the area limits the presence of WBH. If this is true then parts of the area at the lake could be cleared to create some open spaces to attract the WBH.
- » Invoke the executive order that was issued by the government declaring the stretch of Pochhu as Heron sanctuary.
- » Develop guidelines to promote good practices and a proper code of conduct for all activities to be enforced stringently.
- » Promote partnership and collaboration among all the stakeholders, partners, and relevant authorities at the national, dzongkhag, and gewog level to recognize the conservation of the WBH as a national priority.

**Development of CBET in the feasible sites:** this would include the sites in Tsirang/Dagana and Berthi in Zhemgang where there is potential to develop CBET. However, the initiative should only be taken up if it contributes to the conservation of the WBH. Considering these areas as the most feasible sites for the development of CBET, management plans should be developed to include the following:

- » Adopting an integrated approach. This means CBET development should not be pursued in isolation rather it should be integrated with other sectors of the rural economy to complement already existing livelihoods.
- » Finding the best way to involve the community and empower them economically, psychologically, socially, and politically.

- » Developing enabling policies to promote CBET. The national, and local regulations should be conducive for locals and investors to promote the development of CBET.
- » Developing diverse and unique products. Product development is an integration of attractions and facilities together with the effort of people to deliver services and facilitate activities. Product identification/development would include nature and culture-based activities, nature trails, local food products and gastronomy, revival of traditional activities, etc. Identify unique selling propositions (USPs) to make the destination different from others.
- » Capacity building and skills development. Tourism requires certain skills for which there should be opportunities and means to develop the capacity of the local communities.
- » Development of services and amenities to cater to the comfort and expectations of the visitors.
- » Enhancing promotions and marketing. Need to understand the different market segments and accordingly use the most suitable branding and promotional means to attract those markets.
- » Mechanisms to strengthen benefits to the people (community) and Nature (WBH).
- » Promoting environmental awareness and education.
- » Monitoring performance and ensuring continuity.
- » Ensuring sustainability in all areas i.e.
- » Economic sustainability: sustaining the benefits for the community.
- » Management sustainability: formation of local mgt groups. External linkages to support management from Dzongkhag and National agencies like TCB and other tourism-related agencies.
- » Ecological sustainability: to manage impacts and ensure that the ecology is not adversely impacted. This will involve stringent enforcement of regulations and where necessary even applying the principle of non-negotiable by restricting some areas to visitation. Developing and implementing an appropriate code of conduct for visitors.

## Conclusion

The onus of taking forward the recommendations does not necessarily fall on RSPN. However, RSPN, as the proponent, should take the initiative to draw the attention of the relevant stakeholders and partners to take action. Since the actions are complex it needs the concerted effort and commitment of all relevant stakeholders. RSPN could play the role of the facilitator to achieve this.

The WBH habitats are shrinking at an exponential rate and the river habitats are transforming at an alarming pace. The fate of the WBH is in a precarious position. Therefore, any intervention, including the development of CBET should only be applied if it can support the conservation of WBH and not come at the cost of further aggravating the adverse impacts. Saving the WBH from extinction is an emergency and a national call. This needs to be given utmost top priority by the government and the people of Bhutan. RSPN should dedicate further time and effort to take the lead as a facilitator to secure the future of the WBH.

## **Acknowledgments**

The study team consisting of consultants and members from RSPN would like to thank all the people (as listed in appendix I) for taking their time to share their views in providing invaluable input to the study.

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## Annexure I: list of consultations

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### National Level

**5<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

#### Consultation with Tarayana Foundation

1. Mr. Kelzang Tobgay
2. Ms. Karma Yuden

**6<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

#### Consultation with the Agency for Promotion of Indigenous Crafts (APIC)

1. Mr. Lam Kezang, CEO
2. Mr. Pema Lodey, Adm/HR officer, APIC
3. Ms. Tshering Pelden, Sr. Communications Officer, APIC
4. Mr. Cheki Dorji, Cluster development officer, APIC
5. Mr. Karma Wangchuk, RSPN
6. Ms. Sangay, RSPN

#### Consultation with the Guide Association of Bhutan (GAB)

1. Mr. Garab dorji, President
2. Mr. Keshab Pradhan, Officiating Executive Director

#### Consultation with HELVETAS

1. Lekey Wangdi, Project Advisor

#### Consultation with the Bhutan Ecological Society (BES)

1. Mr. Nawang Norbu, ED, BES

**8<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

#### Consultation with ABTO, TCB, HRAB

1. Mr. Rinzi Gyamtsho, Chief, TCB
2. Ms. Nima, Ecotourism Flagship Program, TCB
3. Mr. Tek Bahadur, ABTO
4. Rep TO, BTCL
5. Rep TO, Bhutan Yarden
6. Rep TO, Gangri Tours and Treks
7. Rep TO, Original Bhutan
8. Rep, HRAB

## **Consultation with Department of Forest**

1. Mr. Sonam Wangdi, CFO, NCD
2. Ms. Kezang Wangmo, NCD
3. Ms. Tshering Zam, NCD
4. Ms. Tshering Pem, NCD
5. Mr. Kado Rinchen - representative of Trongsa dzongkhag
6. Mr. Chimi Rinzin – representative of Wangdue and Punakha dzongkhag
7. Ms. Kezang Wangmo – representative of Zhemgang dzongkhag
8. Mr. Chimi Dorji –representative of Tsirang dzongkhag
9. Ms. Sonam Yangchen – representative of Dagana dzongkhag

## **Dzongkhag and Gewog level**

### **PUNAKHA**

#### **List of Participants from Dzongkhag**

1. Dasho Dzungda (Virtual attendance)
2. Dr. Karma Tshering (Virtual attendance) – EcoCall Consultancy
3. Mr. Yeshi Dorji – EDO Punakha Dzongkhag
4. Ms. Rinzin Lhamo – AMCO
5. Mr. Phub Tshering – DPO
6. Ms. Tshering Choki – Athang Training Academy
7. Mr. Gaylong – DAO
8. Mr. Pema Namgay – Forest Ranger
9. Ms. Khachi Wangmo – RSPN
10. Mr. Karma Wangchuk – RSPN
11. Ms. Dinchoe Wangmo – Legal Officer
12. Mr. Sonam Wangyel Tshering – Intern, EcoCall

#### **List of Participants from Chhubu and Toedwang gewogs**

1. Mr. Ugyen wangchuk (Toewang gup)
2. Mr. Leki dorji (Toedwang mangmi)
3. Ms. Kuenzang choden (Toedwang ADM)
4. Ms. Tshering wangmo (Tshachuphu tshongpa)
5. Ms. Leera maya अधिकारी (Toedwang agriculture)
6. Ms. Dorji wangmo (Toedwang livestock)
7. Mr. Norbu (FR-I)
8. Mr. Jimbu gyelsthen ( Chhubu gup)
9. Mr. Dorji khandu (Chhubu mangmi)
10. Ms. Tandi wangmo (Chhubu ADM)
11. Ms. Tshering lhamo (Chhubu agriculture)
12. Mr. Wangchuk (Chhubu livestock)
13. Mr. sonam penjor (Ranger)
14. Dr. Karma tshering (CEO, Ecocall consultancy)

15. Ms. Tshering choki (Athang Training Academy)
16. Dr. Norbu wangdi (project coordinator, RSPN)
17. Ms. Khachi wangmo (PO, RSPN)
18. Mr. Tshering dhendup (RSPN)
19. Ms. Pema lhaden (Intern, Ecocall consultancy)

#### **List of participants from Dzomi and Shengana gewogs**

1. Mr. Samten phuntsho (Shengana gup)
2. Mr. Pempa (Shengana mangmi)
3. Mr. Chencho dorji (Shengana agriculture)
4. Mr. Singye ( Shengana beat officer)
5. Mr. Phurba dorji (Shengana GAO)
6. Mr. Gyeltshen (Dzomi GAO)
7. Mr. Limbo dorji (Dzomi Sr. ES III)
8. Mr. Tek lal gurung (Dzomi forest incharge)
9. Mr. Phuntsho namgay (Dzomi Sr. LS)
10. Mr. Tshechu D. wang (Systimax AV)
11. Ms. Karma cheki (ESE)
12. Dr. Karma tshering (CEO, Ecocall consultancy)
13. Ms. Tshering choki (Athang Training Academy)
14. Dr. Norbu wangdi (project coordinator, RSPN)
15. Ms. Khachi wangmo (PO, RSPN)
16. Mr. Tshering dhendup (RSPN)
17. Ms. Pema lhaden (Intern, Ecocall consultancy)

#### **List of participants from Guma, Goenshari, Lingmukha, and Kabisa gewogs.**

1. Mr. Wangchuk (Goenshari gup)
2. Mr. Kinley Gyeltshen (Guma gup)
3. Mr. Sonam Toesel (Lingmukha gup)
4. Mr. Pema Namgay (Forest ranger I)
5. Mr. Karma Gyeltshen (Sr. forest ranger II)
6. Mr. Chimi Rinzin (Sr. forest ranger III)
7. Mr. Karma Gyeltshen ( Kabisa GAO)
8. Ms. Namgay Zam (Agri-extension)
9. Mr. Karma Tenzin (Agri-extention, Kabisa)
10. Mr. Phub Tshering ( Goenshari mangmi)
11. Mr. Phub Gyeltshen (Kabisa mangmi)
12. Ms. Thuji Zangmo (Lingmukha, GAO)
13. Mr. Sherab Dorji (Guma GAO)
14. Ms. Kinley Choki (Goenshari GAO)
15. Mr. Sonam Jamtsho (Goenshari, livestock)
16. Mr. Tshewang Tashi (Guma, livestock)
17. Dr. Karma Tshering (CEO, Ecocall consultancy)
18. Ms. Tshering Choki (Athang Training Academy)

19. Dr. Norbu Wangdi (project coordinator, RSPN)
20. Ms. Khachi Wangmo (PO, RSPN)
21. Mr. Tshering Dhendup (RSPN)
22. Ms. Pema Lhaden (Intern, Ecocall consultancy)

## **WANGDUEPHODRANG**

### **List of Participants from Dzongkhag**

1. Dasho Sonam Jamtsho – Wangdue Dzongda
2. Tshewang Namgyal – Dzongrab
3. Dechen Wangmo – EDO
4. Kuenga Wangmo – Land Registrar
5. Jigme Dorji – DPO
6. Jigme Wangchuk – Tarayana PO
7. Tshering Choki, Athang Training Academy
8. Sonam Wangyel Tshering – Ecocall consultancy
9. Karma Thinley – Private Entrepreneur
10. Khachi Wangmo – RSPN
11. Karma Wangchuk – RSPN

### **List of Participants from Thetsho gewog**

3. Mr. Chedo (Thedtsho Gup)
4. Mr. yeshi (Tshokpa, Wonjokha)
5. Mrs. Chhimi (Tshokpa, Thango)
6. Mr. Nima (Tshokpa, Jang-Rinchengang)
7. Mr. Sangay Penjor (Mami)
8. Mr. Kengay Tenzin (Geduu)
9. Mrs. Nima Dem ( Tshokpa, Lho-Rinchengang)
10. Mrs Jamtsho Lhamo (Thestsho gewog)
11. Miss. Dechen Wangmo (EDO-DAW)
12. Mrs. Khachi Wangmo (RSPN)
13. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (RSPN)
14. Mrs. Tshering Choki (Athang\_
15. Mr. Sonam Wangyel Tshering (Intern)
16. Miss Pema Lhaden (Intern)

### **List of Participants from Athang and Dakar gewogs**

1. Mr. Dawa Gyeltshen (Athang gup)
2. Mr. Kinga (Dagar gup)
3. Mr. Dorji (Tshokpa, Wagay)
4. Mr. Kinley Rabgay (Tshokpa, Gaybalche)
5. Mr. Desang (GAO)
6. Mr. Dawa Duba (Gedung)
7. Mr. Raten (Tshokpa, Uma khaty)

8. Mrs. Sonam Lham (Mangmi, Dagar gewog)
9. Mrs. Tshering Wangmo (Mangmi, Athang gewog)
10. Mr. Sonam Tshering (Gewog Admin. Officer)
11. Mrs. Khachi Wangmo (RSPN)
12. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (RSPN)
13. Mrs. Tshering Choki (Athang)
14. Mr. Sonam Wangyel Tshering (Intern)
15. Miss Pema Lhaden (Intern)

#### **List of Participants from Rubesa gewogs**

1. Mr. Karma Wangdi (GUP)
2. Mr. Tika Ram Bahandari (Sr. ES)
3. Mr. Cheku (Livestock extension officer)
4. Mrs. Thuji om (Gewog Mangmi)
5. Mrs Tashi dema (Gewog Tshogpa)
6. Mr. Pema Namgye ( GAO)
7. Dr. Norbu Wangdi (Project coordinator, RSPN)
8. Mrs. Sangay dema (RSPN)
9. Mrs. Khachi Wangmo (RSPN)
10. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (RSPN)
11. Mrs. Tshering Choki (Athang)
12. Mr. Sonam Wangyel Tshering (Intern)
13. Miss Pema Lhaden (Intern)

#### **TSIRANG**

##### **List of Participants from Dzongkhag**

- Ms. Karma Wangmo (Planning Officer)
- Mr. Kinley (Sr. FR)
- Mr. Jigme Tenzin (Sr. LPO)
- Mr. Dorj Wangdi (Environment Officer)
- Mr. Dorji Gyeltshen (DAO)
- Mr. Tshewang Lhendup (RSPN)
- Mr. Tseten Dorji (Chief, RSPN)
- Ms. Tshering Choki (Athang Training Institute).
- Mr. Karma Wangchuk (SLD, RSPN)
- Ms. Khachi Wangmo (PO, RSPN)
- Mr. Thinley Phuntsho (RO, RSPN)
- Mr. Tshering Dhendup (RSPN)
- Ms. Pema Lhaden (Intern, Ecocall Consultancy)

### **List of Participants from Barshong gewogs**

1. Ms. Dorji Dema (Gao)
2. Mr. Ratna Bahadur Chuwan (Livestock)
3. Mr. Lal Bdr. Tamang (Tshokpa)
4. Mr. Man Bdr. Powrel (Tshogpa)
5. Mr. Mandhas Tamang ( Tshogpa)
6. Mr. Baliman Tamang (Tshogpa)
7. Ms. Singay Yuden (Cse)
8. Mr. Sonam Tshering(Agriculture)
9. Mr. Chida Nanda (Caretaker)
10. Mr. Tseten Dorji (Chief, Rspn)
11. Ms. Tshering Choki (Athang Training Institute).
12. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (Sld, Rspn)
13. Ms. Khachi Wangmo (Po, Rspn)
14. Mr. Thinley Phuntsho (Ro, Rspn)
15. Mr. Tshering Dhendup (Rspn)
16. Ms. Pema Lhaden (Intern, Ecocall Consultancy)

### **List of Participants from Rangthaling gewogs**

1. Mr. Mon Bahadur Monger (GAO)
2. Mr. Kinley Phub (FR)
3. Mr. Dil Bdr. Tamang (Tshogpa)
4. Ms. Rinchen Lhamo (Sungchop)
5. Ms. Roshni Rai (Gewog Cc)
6. Mr. Tseten Dorji (Chief, RSPN)
7. Ms. Tshering Choki (Athang Training Institute).
8. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (SLD, RSPN)
9. Ms. Khachi Wangmo (PO, RSPN)
10. Mr. Thinley Phuntsho (RO, RSPN)
11. Mr. Tshering Dhendup (RSPN)
12. Ms. Pema Lhaden (Intern, Ecocall Consultancy)

### **List of Participants from Sergithang gewogs**

1. Mr. Sonam Dorji (Mangmi)
2. Mr. Phurba (Tshogpa)
3. Mr. Laxmi Kante Sayar (Tshogpa)
4. Mr. Budha Bir Rai (Tshogpa)
5. Mr. Bir Bdr. Rai (Tshogpa)
6. Mr. Karma (HA)
7. Mr. Dhan Bdr. Galley (Sr. ES)
8. Mr. Sherab Dorji (Teacher)
9. Mr. Sangay Phuntsho (Sr. LPS, RNR)

10. Mr. Bircha Bdr. Monger (FR)
11. Mr. Tseten Dorji (Chief, RSPN)
12. Ms. Tshering Choki (Athang Training Institute).
13. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (SLD, RSPN)
14. Ms. Khachi Wangmo (PO, RSPN)
15. Mr. Thinley Phuntsho (RO, RSPN)
16. Mr. Tshering Dhendup (RSPN)
17. Ms. Pema Lhaden (Intern, Ecocall Consultancy)

#### **List of Participants from Langthil gewogs**

1. Mr. Nanda Lal Kharel (Gup)
2. Mr. Yeshe (Principal, Tsihangtoe C S)
3. Mr. Tandin Tshering (Tshogpa)
4. Mr. Tek Bahadur Rai (Tshogpa)
5. Mr. Tenzin Wangpo (Tshogpa)
6. Mr. Tshering Dorji (Tshogpa)
7. Mr. Tshering Tenzin (Agriculture Officer)
8. Mr. Wangchuk (Gewog Caretaker)
9. Mr. Tseten Dorji (Chief, RSPN)
10. Ms. Tshering Choki (Athang Training Institute).
11. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (SLD, RSPN)
12. Ms. Khachi Wangmo (PO, RSPN)
13. Mr. Thinley Phuntsho (RO, RSPN)
14. Mr. Tshering Dhendup (RSPN)
15. Ms. Pema Lhaden (Intern, Ecocall Consultancy)

#### **DAGANA**

##### **List of Participants from Dzongkhag**

1. Mr. Sonam Jamtsho (Dzongda)
2. Mr. Jamyang Norbu (Dzongrab)
3. Mr. Sonam Jamtsho (Tseza Gup)
4. Mr. Ngawang Dorji (Tseza Mangmi)
5. Mr. Pema Wangchuk (DLO)
6. Mr. Phuntsho Gayley (Tseza Gewog Engineers)
7. Mr. Dorji Wangdi (Surveyor, Land Record Sector)
8. Mr. DC Bhandari (DAO)
9. Mr. Dawa Penjor (Zomtu Tshogpa)
10. Mr. Karma Dorji (Environment Officer)
11. Mr. Jigme Dorji (Thromde Ngoshab)
12. Ms. Tashi Choki (PA)
13. Mr. Tseten Dorji (Chief, RSPN)
14. Ms. Tshering Choki (Athang Training Institute).

15. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (SLD, RSPN)
16. Ms. Khachi Wangmo (PO, RSPN)
17. Mr. Thinley Phuntsho (RO, RSPN)
18. Mr. Tshering Dhendup (RSPN)
19. Ms. Pema Lhaden (Intern, Ecocall Consultancy)

#### **List of Participants from Gozhi, Kana and Tsendagang gewogs**

1. Mr. Bal Bdr. Rana (Tsendagang Gup)
2. Mr. Chador (Kana Gup)
3. Mr. Kinzang Tobgay (Gozhi Gup)
4. Mr. Rinchen Wangdi (Tsendagang GAO)
5. Mr. Bik Bdr. Thingh (Goshi Bar Tshogpa)
6. Mr. Bluim Kumar Poudel (Gozhi Dogale Tshogpa)
7. Mr. Tuk Bdr. Subba (Balleygang Tshogpa)
8. Mr. Karna Bdr. Bal (Tsendagang Tshongpa)
9. Mr. Uttau Gurung (Gozhi Maed Tshogpa)
10. Mr. Nima Tshering Ghishing (Gozhi-Toed Tshogpa)
11. Mr. Gyem Gyelsthen (Samarchu Tshogpa)
12. Mr. Ugyen Wangdi (Gangzar Toed Tshogpa)
13. Mr. Tandin Wangyel (Gangzar Maed Tshogpa)
14. Mr. Pema Lethro (Forest Ranger-Dagapela)
15. Ms. Sangay Wangmo (Mangmi, Gozhi)
16. Mr. Kinzang Tenzin (Mangmi, Tsendagang)
17. Mr. Langa Dorji (GAO, Kana)
18. Mr. Tseten Dorji (Chief, RSPN)
19. Ms. Tshering Choki (Athang Training Institute).
20. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (SLD, RSPN)
21. Ms. Khachi Wangmo (PO, RSPN)
22. Mr. Thinley Phuntsho (RO, RSPN)
23. Mr. Tshering Dhendup (RSPN)
24. Ms. Pema Lhaden (Intern, Ecocall Consultancy)

#### **List of Participants from Gesarling and Dorona gewogs**

1. Mr. Mani Leumar Ghishy (Geserling Gup)
2. Mr. Tenzin Wangchuk (Geserling Tshogpa)
3. Mr. Bek Bdr. Rai (Dorona Mangmi)
4. Mr. Norbu Phuntsho (Geserling Mangme)
5. Mr. Ashok Kumar Pradhan (Sr. ES –II)
6. Mr. Jambay Dorji (Geserling CSE)
7. Mr. Ganga Ram Gurung (Livestock, Geserling)
8. MR. Leki Dorji (Mameything Tshogpa)
9. Mr. Pema Tobden (Nimtola Chiwog Tshogpa)
10. Ms. Dawa Dema (GAO-Doma)

11. Mr. Thinley Namgay (Caretaker)
12. Mr. Subash Rai (Dorona Driver)
13. Mr. Tseten Dorji (Chief, RSPN)
14. Ms. Tshering Choki (Athang Training Institute).
15. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (SLD, RSPN)
16. Ms. Khachi Wangmo (PO, RSPN)
17. Mr. Thinley Phuntsho (RO, RSPN)
18. Mr. Tshering Dhendup (RSPN)
19. Ms. Pema Lhaden (Intern, Ecocall Consultancy)

#### **List of Participants from Tashiding gewog**

1. Mr. Raj Man Bhur (Mangmi)
2. Mr. Karma Singh Golay (Tech-III)
3. Mr. Dham Bdr. Golay (Tashichi Chiwog Tshogpa)
4. Mr. Prem Dan Limbu (Sr. AES)
5. Mr. L.B Tamang (SR.FR-III)
6. Mr. Lhatu (CSE)
7. Mr. Bir Man Tamang (Tshogpa)
8. Mr. Lobzang Choda
9. Mr. Tik Bdr. Gurung (Caretaker)
10. Mr. Tseten Dorji (Chief, RSPN)
11. Ms. Tshering Choki (Athang Training Institute).
12. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (SLD, RSPN)
13. Ms. Khachi Wangmo (PO, RSPN)
14. Mr. Thinley Phuntsho (RO, RSPN)
15. Mr. Tshering Dhendup (RSPN)
16. Ms. Pema Lhaden (Intern, Ecocall Consultancy)

#### **List of Participants from Lajab, Drujeygang and Tsangkha gewogs**

1. Mr. Dhan Bdr. Gurung (Lajab Gup)
2. Mr. Pema Jamtsho (Lajab GAO)
3. Mr. Krishna Bdr. Subba (Lajab Tshogpa)
4. Mr. Singye Dorji (Drujeygang Gup)
5. Mr. Lhakpa Dorji (Drujeygang GAO)
6. Ms. Choden Mo (Drujeygang Tshogpa)
7. Mr. Sonam Rinchen (Drujeygang Gewog Driver)
8. Mr. Neuley Tshering ( Tsangkha, Gup)
9. Mr. Sangay Dorji Tamang ( Tsangkha, Mangmi)
10. Mr. Tashi Man Alley (Tsangkha, Tshogpa)
11. Mr. Passang Tshering Tamang ( Tsangkha, Tshogpa)
12. Mr. Nidup Dorji (Tsangkha, Tshogpa)
13. Mr. Dorji Drukpa (Tsangkha, Tshogpa)
14. Mr. Kishna Bdr. Subba (Tsangkha, Tshogpa)

15. Mr. Jigme Samdrup (Sr. GAO, Tsangkha)
16. Mr. Tseten Dorji (Chief, RSPN)
17. Ms. Tshering Choki (Athang Training Institute).
18. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (SLD, RSPN)
19. Ms. Khachi Wangmo (PO, RSPN)
20. Mr. Thinley Phuntsho (RO, RSPN)
21. Mr. Tshering Dhendup (RSPN)
22. Ms. Pema Lhaden (Intern, Ecocall Consultancy)

## **TRONGSA**

### **List of Participants from Dzongkhag**

1. Mr. Phub Tshering (Dasho Dzongda)
2. Mrs. Sonam Dema (EDO)
3. Mrs. Bunisha Pradhan (Architect)
4. Mr. Phuntsho Rinzin (DPO)
5. Mr. Jigme Chopel (DLO)
6. Mr. Dorji Khandu (Env. Officer)
7. Mr. Tharchen (EDE)
8. Dr. Norbu Wangdi (Project coordinator, RSPN)
9. Mrs. Sangay dema (RSPN)
10. Mrs. Khachi Wangmo (RSPN)
11. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (RSPN)
12. Mrs. Tshering Choki (Athang)
13. Mr. Sonam Wangyel Tshering (Intern)
14. Miss Pema Lhaden (Intern)

### **List of Participants from Langthil gewog**

1. Mr. Rinzin Wangchuk (Gup)
2. Mr. Yeshe Wangdi (PRD)
3. Mr. Setheep Adhikari (Beat incharge)
4. Mr. Tshering (Mangmi)
5. Mr. Sam Bahadur Rai (Tarayana)
6. Mrs. Sonam Choki (GAO)
7. Mr. Tenzinla (Tshogpa)
8. Mrs. Sonam Dema (Caretaker)
9. Mrs Sonam Dema (EDO)
10. Mr. Narayan Ghalley (RSPN)
11. Dr. Norbu Wangdi (Project coordinator, RSPN)
12. Mrs. Sangay dema (RSPN)
13. Mrs. Khachi Wangmo (RSPN)
14. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (RSPN)
15. Mrs. Tshering Choki (Athang)

16. Mr. Sonam Wangyel Tshering (Intern)
17. Miss Pema Lhaden (Intern)
18. Mr. Tenzin Nima (RSPN)

#### **List of Participants from Korphu gewogs**

1. Mr. Rinchen Gyeltshen (Parl officer)
2. Mr. Changala (chairman-ecotourism)
3. Mr. Genpo Dorji (Tshogpa-Khorphu)
4. Mr. Dorji Tshewang (Tshogpa-Neshing)
5. Mr. Thinley Dorji (Mangmi)
6. Mr. Tshering (Nabji ranger)
7. Mr. Karma Tshering (Nimshong eco-member)
8. Mrs. Tashi Choden (GAO-Khorphu gewog)
9. Mrs Sonam Dema (EDO)
10. Mr. Narayan Ghalley (RSPN)
11. Dr. Norbu Wangdi (Project coordinator, RSPN)
12. Mrs. Sangay dema (RSPN)
13. Mrs. Khachi Wangmo (RSPN)
14. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (RSPN)
15. Mrs. Tshering Choki (Athang)
16. Mr. Sonam Wangyel Tshering (Intern)
17. Miss Pema Lhaden (Intern)
18. Mr. Tenzin Nima (RSPN)

#### **ZHEMGANG**

##### **List of Participants from Dzongkhag**

1. Mr. Ugyen Lhendup (DLO)
2. Mrs. Kezang Wangmo (Sr. F. O)
3. Mrs. Sherab Zangmo (Asst. Env. Officer)
4. Mr. Lhakpa Tshering (MCO)
5. Mr. Jambay Ugyen (DAO)
6. Mrs Sonam Dema (EDO)
7. Mr. Narayan Ghalley (RSPN)
8. Dr. Norbu Wangdi (Project coordinator, RSPN)
9. Mrs. Sangay dema (RSPN)
10. Mrs. Khachi Wangmo (RSPN)
11. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (RSPN)
12. Mrs. Tshering Choki (Athang)
13. Mr. Sonam Wangyel Tshering (Intern)
14. Miss Pema Lhaden (Intern)
15. Mr. Tenzin Nima (RSPN)

### **List of Participants from Nangkor gewogs**

1. Mr. Langa Tshering (AO, ARDSC, Tingtibi)
2. Mr. Kuenzang Thinley (Sr. RR-III)
3. Mr. Kinkhea Tenzin ( AES-Trong, Tingtibi)
4. Mr. Tashi Peldeu (GAO)
5. Mrs Sonam Dema (EDO)
6. Mr. Narayan Ghalley (RSPN)
7. Dr. Norbu Wangdi (Project coordinator, RSPN)
8. Mrs. Sangay dema (RSPN)
9. Mrs. Khachi Wangmo (RSPN)
10. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (RSPN)
11. Mrs. Tshering Choki (Athang)
12. Mr. Sonam Wangyel Tshering (Intern)
13. Miss Pema Lhaden (Intern)
14. Mr. Tenzin Nima (RSPN)

### **List of Participants from Trong gewogs**

1. Langa Tshering, AO, ARDC, Tingtibi
2. Kuenzang Thinley, Senior Ranger, RR-III, Zhemgang Division
3. Kinkhen Tenzin, AES, Trong, Tingtibi
4. Tashi Palden, GAO, Trong Gewog
5. Mr. Narayan Ghalley (RSPN)
6. Dr. Norbu Wangdi (Project coordinator, RSPN)
7. Mrs. Sangay dema (RSPN)
8. Mrs. Khachi Wangmo (RSPN)
9. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (RSPN)
10. Mrs. Tshering Choki (Athang)
11. Mr. Sonam Wangyel Tshering (Intern)
12. Miss Pema Lhaden (Intern)
13. Mr. Tenzin Nima (RSPN)

### **List of Participants from Phangkar gewogs**

1. Mrs. Rinchen Pelzom (GAO)
2. Mr. Rinchen Penjor (Research candidate, CNR)
3. Mr. Pema Zangpo (Pantang BO)
4. Mr. Tshering Norbu ( Chairman-Ecolodge)
5. Mr. Om Pradhan (Pantang RNR-ec)
6. Mr. Narayan Ghalley (RSPN)
7. Dr. Norbu Wangdi (Project coordinator, RSPN)
8. Mrs. Sangay dema (RSPN)
9. Mrs. Khachi Wangmo (RSPN)
10. Mr. Karma Wangchuk (RSPN)
11. Mrs. Tshering Choki (Athang)

12. Mr. Sonam Wangyel Tshering (Intern)
13. Miss Pema Lhaden (Intern)
14. Mr. Tenzin Nima (RSPN)

#### List of participants during the national validation meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2022

| SN  | Name               | Designation and Organization      | Email ID                         |
|-----|--------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1.  | Tshering Pem       | Sr. FO, NCD, DoFPS                | tpem@moaf.gov.bt                 |
| 2.  | Jigme Dorji        | PTS,TCB                           | jigmed@tourism.gov.bt.           |
| 3.  | Thinley Jamtsho    | Planning Officer, Zhemgang        | jamtsho@zhemgang.gov.bt          |
| 4.  | Ugyen Wangchuk     | Environment Officer               | uwangchuk@wangduephodrang.gov.bt |
| 5.  | Chador Wangmo      | Asst.Program Officer              | chadorw1998@bes.org.bt           |
| 6.  | Karma Wangmo       | Sr.Planning Officer, Tsirang      | karmawangmo@tsirang.gov.bt       |
| 7.  | Tshering Nyedup    | Sr. EDO, Dagana                   | tsheringnidup@moea.gov.bt        |
| 8.  | Tshering Choki     | DoC                               | tchoki@mohca.gov.bt              |
| 9.  | Yeshe Dorji        | EDO, Punakha                      | ydorji@punakha.gov.bt            |
| 10. | Yonten Phuntsho    | Program Coordinator, WWF          | yphuntsho@wwfbhutan.org.bt       |
| 11. | Lekey Wangdi       | Helvetas Bhutan                   | lekey.wangdi@helvetas.org.bt     |
| 12. | Cheki Dorji        | APIC                              | chekidorji@gmail.com             |
| 13. | Karma Uden         | Tarayana Foundation               | karmaudentarayana@gmail.com      |
| 14. | Garab Dorji        | Chairman, GAB                     | gaaraab@gmail.com                |
| 15. | Pema Lodey         | Sr.PO/DMO/AMC                     | pemalodey83@gmail.com            |
| 16. | Dr. Karma Tshering | Eco-Call Consultancy and Services | ecocallbhutan@gmail.com          |
| 17. | Tshering Choki     | Athang Training Academy           | choki@athang.com                 |
| 18. | Dr. Kinley Tenzin  | ED, RSPN                          | ktenzin@rspnbhutan.org           |
| 19. | Rinchen Wangmo     | Director, PDD, RSPN               | rwangmo@rspnbhutan.org           |
| 20. | Lungten Norbu      | Specialists, PDD, RSPN            | lnorbu@rspnbhutan.org            |
| 21. | Sonam Jamtsho      | Chief, FID                        | sjamtsho@rspnbhutan.org          |
| 22. | Dr. Norbu Wangdi   | Project Coordinator, BMU-<br>IKI  | nwangdi@rspnbhutan.org           |
| 23. | Phurpa Dorji       | Specialists, PDD                  | pdorji@rspnbhutan.org            |
| 24. | Jigme Tshering     | BNC National Coordinator          | jtshering@rspnbhutan.org         |
| 25. | Deki Dema          | Interim Chief, CED                | ddema@rspnbhutan.org             |

|     |                         |                                |                          |
|-----|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 26. | Damcho Yonten           | ICT Officer, CED               | dyonten@rspnbhutan.org   |
| 27. | Tshering Tobgay         | Project Officer, SHCD          | ttobgay@rspnbhutan.org   |
| 28. | Karma Wangchuk          | Project Officer, SLD           | kwangchuk@rspnbhutan.org |
| 29. | Khachi Wangmo           | Project Officer, SLD           | kwangmo@rspnbhutan.org   |
| 30. | Sangay Dema             | Communications Officer,<br>CED | sdema@rspnbhutan.org     |
| 31. | Indra Prasad<br>Acharja | Chief, SHCD                    | ipacharja@rspnbhutan.org |
| 32. | Tsheten Dorji           | Chief, SLD                     | tdorji@rspnbhutan.org    |



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**Royal Society for Protection of Nature**

P.O. Box: 325, Building No.: 25

Lhado Lam, Kawajangsa | Thimphu 11001, Bhutan

Phone: +975 2 322056 | 326130 | Fax: +975 2 323189

Website: <http://www.rspnbhutan.org> | E-mail: [rspn@rspnbhutan.org](mailto:rspn@rspnbhutan.org)