



Carrying Capacity Assessment Report for Haa and Phobjikha

Royal Society for Protection of Nature
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Carrying Capacity Assessment Report for Haa and Phobjikha



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SUMMARY

The community based sustainable tourism project implemented by the Royal Society for Protection of Nature has been designed as a part of the conservation and sustainable livelihood program to harness the tourism potential of Phobjikha Conservation Area and Haa's natural and cultural richness for the benefit of host local communities. Besides providing opportunities for alternative livelihoods of rural communities, it also contributes to the tourism plan for decentralization and management of tourism at the destination level.

The project sites in Haa Dzongkhag are focused on three gewogs - Bjee, Esu and Katsho - designated as *Zone 1* in the Dzongkhag Tourism Development Plan of 2010. The Haa Dzongkhag is still an emerging destination, exploring its potential for tourism development. The other project site, Phobjikha conservation area is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Bhutan, and at the same time one of the most environmentally significant conservation areas in the country. While the rapid development of tourism in these areas brings many benefits, it also poses potential threats to the local environment, the culture, and the social fabric of communities living in the two areas.

Therefore, we must focus on monitoring and managing the impacts. To mitigate the negative effects, whilst maximizing the positive impacts in the two aforementioned areas. This report was drafted based on a study on tourism attractions and assets, development opportunities and challenges in the project areas, the underpinning ecological and socioeconomic factors, and the policies in place. The study used a Limits of Acceptable Change approach to identify the main areas of concern regarding tourism development in the project areas, develop a framework for monitoring and management of tourism impacts, and provide recommendations for initial actions in the two areas.

INTRODUCTION

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN BHUTAN AND EFFORTS OF RSPN

Although widely regarded as a Least Developed Country, Bhutan has made considerable commitments to the conservation of the natural environment. In fact, as one of the four main pillars of the country's development vision of Gross National Happiness, environmental conservation has been identified as a top priority in the Bhutan 2020 vision. The country has taken significant policy measures in protecting the natural environment. On the international front, Bhutan is a signatory to major environmental conventions, which manifests itself within the country through the extensive network of protected areas and biological corridors covering a total of 51.2% of the country. In addition to these protected areas several conservation areas of ecological, cultural and landscape significance have also been designated. Further, the government has pledged to maintain a minimum of 60% forest cover for all times to come. Presently the country has a forest cover of over 71% of its total geographic area.

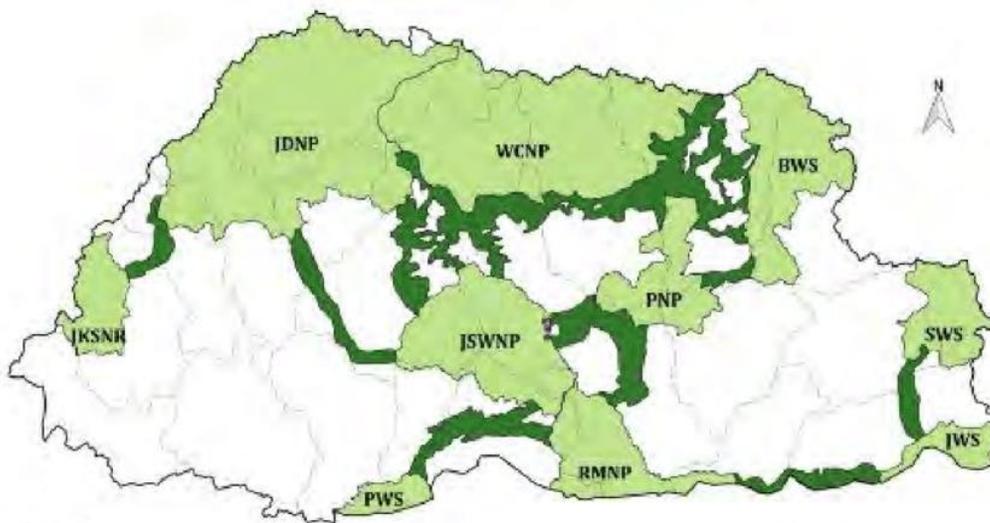
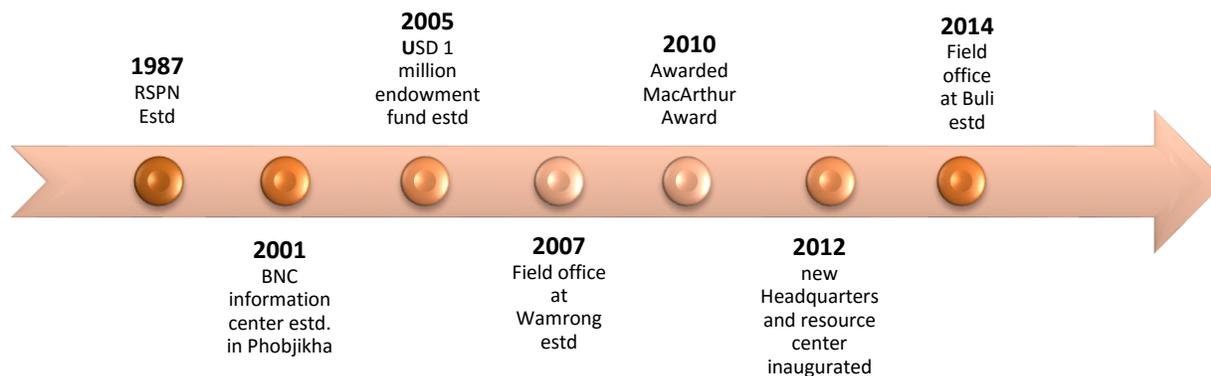


Figure 1: Extensive network of Bhutan's protected areas system comprising a significant size of the geographical area of the country.

Although Bhutan may have gained global admiration for its commitment towards biodiversity conservation, it now faces immense challenges to manage these areas for the needs of both its people and its wildlife. To meet these challenges the concerted efforts of the people and the relevant agencies are critical. Ever since its establishment in 1987, the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN) has tirelessly supported environmental protection efforts in the country. Guided by its vision to ensure that future Bhutanese citizens live in an environmentally sustainable world, RSPN has made it its organization's mission to inspire personal accountability and active participation in the conservation of the Kingdom's natural assets. RSPN focuses on environmental education and advocacy, conservation and sustainable livelihoods, research and

emerging issues like climate change, solid waste and water management. RSPN has, over the years, built a team of committed officials and field staff - a vital resource for the progress of conservation. Some of the key milestones of RSPN are shown below.



RATIONALE FOR CONDUCTING THE STUDY

RSPN has been advocating community based sustainable tourism (CBST) as a part of the conservation and sustainable livelihood program. With the support of support of Japan Environmental Education Forum (JEEF), a project on CBST is being implemented at Phobjikha Conservation Area and Haa. The project aims to harness the tourism potentials for the benefit of local communities living there. It is hoped that this would stimulate their interest and support to protect the natural and cultural heritage of these areas. The project sites in Haa Dzongkhag are focused in the three areas of Bjee, Esu and Katsho Gewogs. These areas are designated as Zone 1 under the Dzongkhag Tourism Development Plan 2010. Haa Dzongkhag is still a new destination being explored for its potential in tourism development. Phobjikha, on the other hand, is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country, while also being an environmentally significant area for conservation. The rate of anthropogenic activities, particularly in relation to tourism development in Phobjikha conservation area, has been rapidly increasing over the years, which further warrants an understanding of the ecological foot prints and the capacity of the area to accommodate these changes.

Therefore, a carrying capacity assessment of tourism resources in these two areas is required to study and understand the level of tourism activity that Phobjikha Conservation Area and Haa Dzongkhag can accommodate, in the context of the socio-ecological environment and visitors' experience.

OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOME

Based on the need to conduct this study the objectives are:

- To carry out an in-depth study of tourism resources in the project areas (Phobjikha and Haa), and provide understanding in relation to the ecological, socioeconomic, policy and infrastructure factors; and
- To develop a report that:
 - Determines resource carrying capacity of the project areas.
 - Identifies areas of concern in tourism growth in the project areas.
 - Recommends development of action plans and institutional framework for monitoring and evaluation of tourism in the project areas.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

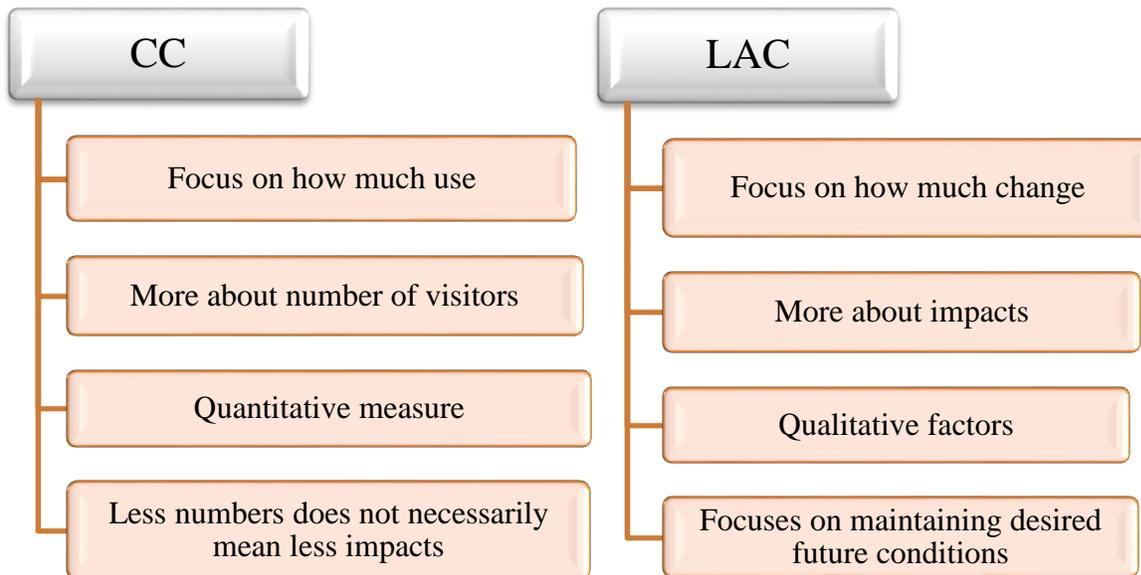
Carrying Capacity (CC) vis-a-vis Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC)

Based on the task and considering the situation of the project sites, a review on the application of carrying capacity vis-a-vis Limits of Acceptable Change was undertaken.

Carrying capacity (CC) as defined by the World Tourism Organization is *'the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction'*. In other words it is also defined as *'the level of human activity an area can accommodate without the area deteriorating, the resident community being adversely affected or the quality of visitors experience declining'* (Middleton & Hawkins Chamberlain, 1997). Both these definitions inform us that carrying capacity is the point at which a destination or attraction starts experiencing adverse impacts resulting from the number of visitors.

Studies on carrying capacity, though designed to elucidate the tourism capacity in an area, increasingly it has failed to meet its objectives. While there were many reasons for its failure the most fundamental was that it prompted resource managers on thinking "how many was too many"? CC was seen more in terms of numbers and quantity rather than the behavior of the people. Due to the failures of using CC the concept of Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) evolved which was found to be more relevant towards resource protection. LAC required managers to define desired acceptable resource conditions and take actions to maintain or achieve those conditions. It helps managers to not only focus on the experiences the visitors seek but to deal with the problems of their social and biophysical impacts.

Differences in CC and LAC



LAC approach is based on three major assumptions (managing visitor impacts, module 3)

- Impact is inevitable, so the focus is on identifying how much impact is acceptable;
- Different sites will have different environments and social conditions;
- A given level of tourism may have different impacts in different situations.

The review provided an understanding that using the LAC approach is a better tool than CC. Adopting this approach the following methods are used for the study:

Consultations

An exercise was undertaken with the project officials of RSPN to identify all the relevant individuals/agencies to be consulted at the national and Dzongkhag/local (field) level.

The national level consultations were conducted in separate meetings with the:

- National Environment Commission (NEC);
- Watershed Management Division, Department of Forests and Parks Services (WMD, DoFPs);
- Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB);
- Hotel & Restaurant Association of Bhutan (HRAB);
- World Wildlife Fund (WWF);
- Dzongdhas (Governors) and sector heads of the district administrations of Wangduephodrang and Haa;
- Agency for the Promotion of Indigenous Crafts (APIC); and
- Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators (ABTO).

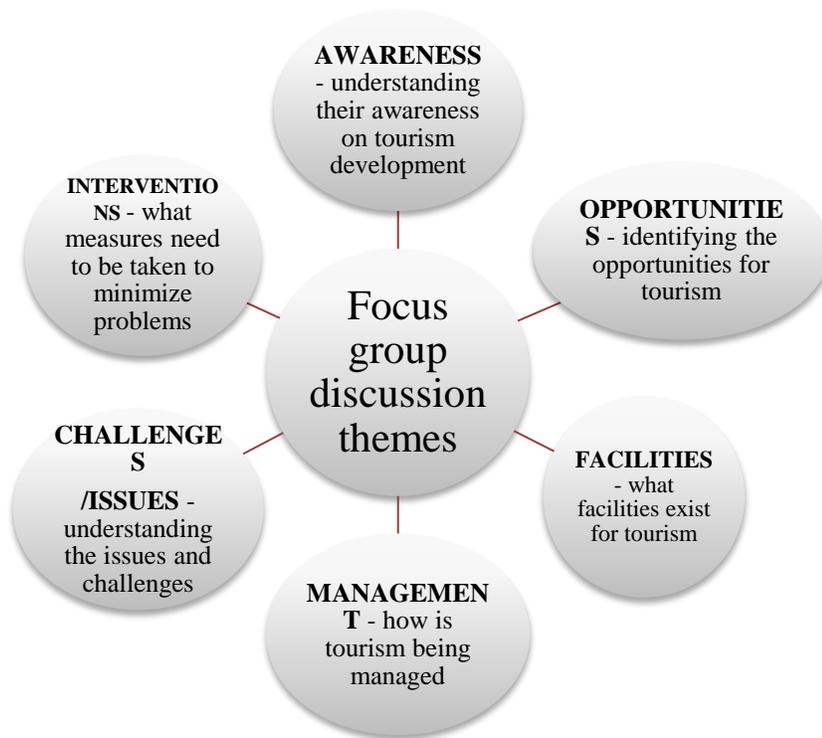
These bilateral meetings were conducted through open discussions in understanding the agencies' concerns and roles in relation to tourism development in the project areas. Preliminary field findings were shared and concerns triggered to comprehend their mitigation measures. Wherever possible the meetings were held with the Head of the agency and focal officers.

In addition to these consultations the steering committee members of the Community based sustainable tourism project were consulted during their 6th steering committee meeting. The members consisted representatives from the Guide Association of Bhutan (GAB), TCB, Haa Dzongkhag, APIC, Nature Recreation Ecotourism Division (NRED), ABTO, JEEF, JICA as observer and representatives from RSPN.

Consultations at the field level were done with Gups (local Head) and other local community representatives; Forestry; Hoteliers; and village home stay owners.

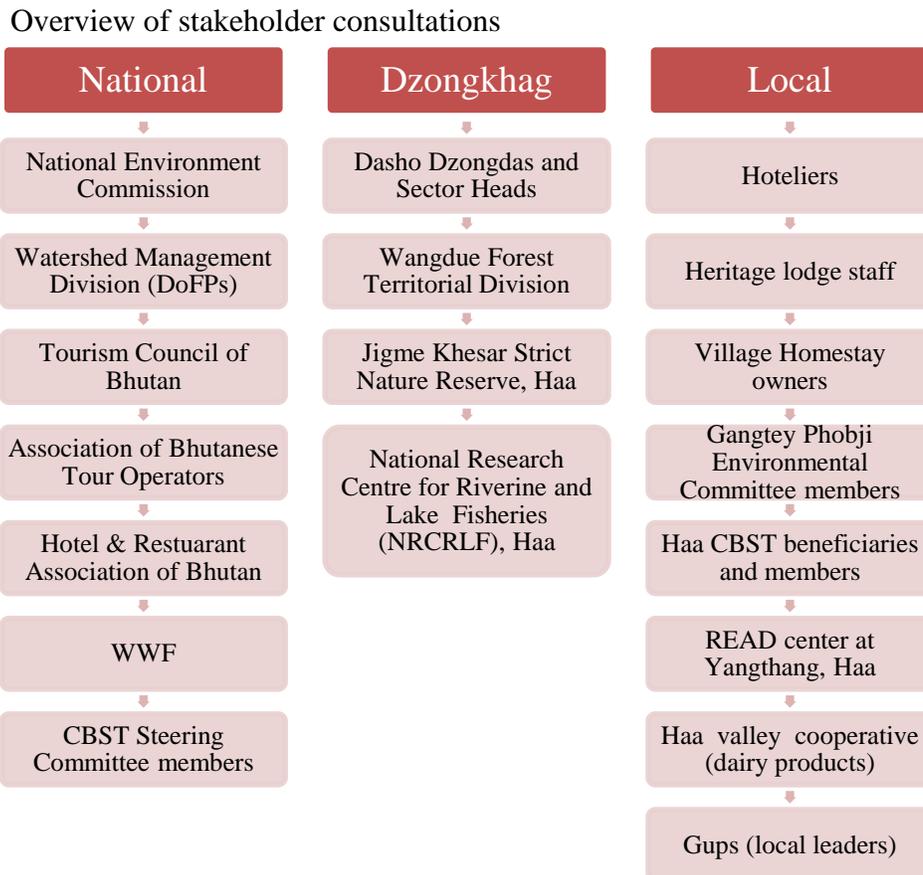
Focus group discussion in Phobjikha site was held with the GPEMC which consisted of member representation from local community, schools, women group, agriculture, livestock, Forestry, and RSPN.

Themes of discussions were based on the figure given below.



The full list of people consulted is attached under appendix 1.

Post field visit consultations: Most of the consultations with the national agencies like the NEC, Forestry, ABTO, HRAB, WWF and Dzongkhag authority of Wangduephodrang were held after the field visit. This was intended to understand the issues and concerns in the field so that these findings could be shared with the authorities, and to apprise them of the field reality and accordingly plan appropriate means to address the issues.



Field observations

Physical inspections of the accommodation properties like hotels and village home stays were made. Walks, hikes and drives were undertaken to cover areas of the project. Since the consultant has been to both the projects sites many times beginning from the mid-1990s the changes in the landscape was observed.

Literature review

Prior research undertaken in this field were considered and reviewed in preparation for this project. These included the following references (the list is provided also for the interest of future researchers):

- Home stay operators manual for Phobjikha (RSPN, 2013)

- Ecotourism guideline for Phobjikha (RSPN, 2012)
- Phobjikha tourism assessment report
- CBST Business plan for Phobjikha Conservation Area
- Black-necked Crane in Bhutan: Current Population status and conservation initiatives (Tshering Phuntsho & Jigme Tshering, 2014)
- Management & business plan for the Black-necked Crane Visitor Center, Phobjikha (RSPN)
- Needs assessment for community based sustainable tourism in Phobjikha/Ada conservation area (RSPN, 2009)
- MoU between RSPN and BPC (2008-2011)
- ICDP Phobjikha
- An integrated assessment of the effects of natural and human disturbances on a wetland ecosystem (ICIMOD & RSPN, 2014)
- PES pilot site Phobjikha Conservation Area Development Fund (RSPN, FAO, WMD, NSSC, 2011)
- APPA report for Phobjikha (SNV, NCD, RSPN, 2003)
- The Phobjikha wetland, the Black-necked Cranes and Community Livelihoods (RSPN, 2004)
- SAARC model village Phobjikha
- Phobjikha socioeconomic analysis (Hilary Faxon, 2011)
- Socio-economic changes and their impacts on the wetland ecosystem of Phobjikha valley, Bhutan (Tshering Phuntsho, MSc. Thesis, 2010)
- Report on tourist willingness to pay survey in Phobjikha
- Haa: an overview of place based cultural resources (Laura Cocora, 2015)
- Refurbishment of houses for farmhouse and home stay programme
- Business plan for Haa valley tourism (Tshering Choki, 2016)
- Baseline survey report for tourism in Bjee, Kartsho, and Usu gewogs in Haa (RSPN, JEEF, JICA, 2015)
- Haa Dzongkhag Tourism Development Plan final draft (Haa Dzongkhag, 2010)
- Report on training of homestays in Haa Dzongkhag (RSPN, JEEF, JICA, 2016)
- Proposal on development of cultural/ecotrail along the Meripuensum (JKSNR)

In addition to the above relevant international literature was reviewed.

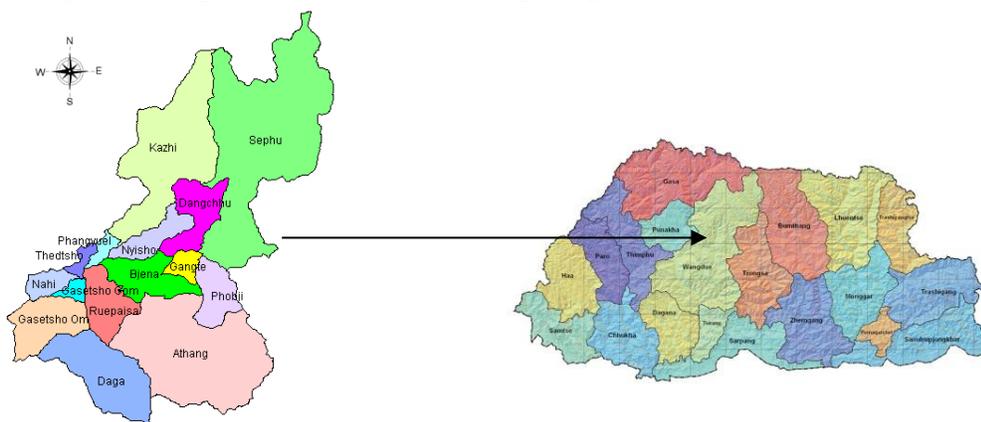
PART A: PHOBIKHA CONSERVATION AREA



Courtesy:TCB

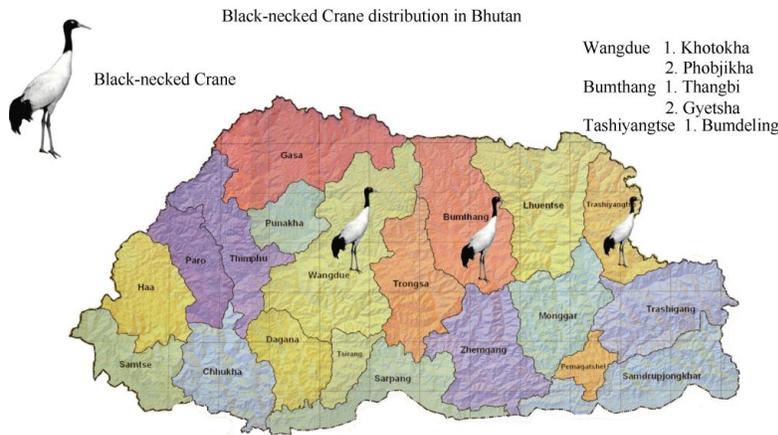
Description and Status of Tourism Development

Phobjikha project site falls under the district of Wangduephodrang. It encompasses two gewogs of Phobji and Gangtey from the total of 15 gewogs of the district.



Gangtey Phobji is the largest wetland in Bhutan. The site covers an area of 975 hectares, and has been enlisted as a Ramsar site from May 2014. Wetlands are considered among the most productive ecosystems as they are a repository of rich biodiversity. Besides this significance, Gangtey Phobji is prominently known in Bhutan for the Black Necked Cranes. An average of over 400 cranes resides in Gangtey Phobji for the winter months, which is the largest winter non-breeding habitat outside China. Located at an altitude range of 2900 meters the climatic conditions

make agriculture difficult. Potatoes are the main agricultural crop that the local farmers rely on for their livelihood.



Map showing areas of Black Necked Cranes in Bhutan (Tshering Phuntsho and Jigme Tshering)

Tourism development in Gangtey Phobji has been emerging rapidly due to its attractive landscape and habitat for the Black-necked cranes.

Some of the key attractions

Cultural resource attraction	Natural resource attraction	Auxiliary services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gantey monastery and spirituality of the place • Farming community and rural landscape • Tsechus and Crane festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The natural landscape of open valley • Vast span of wetlands • Black-necked Cranes • Temperate and semi alpine vegetation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility via good road • Hotels and farmstays for accommodation • Campsites • RSPN Black Necked Crane Visitor Centre with bike rental

Key Issues/Findings

The key issues and findings from field work and consultations are presented within the parameters of ecological, socioeconomic, infrastructure, and policy/management, based on the terms of reference for the study.

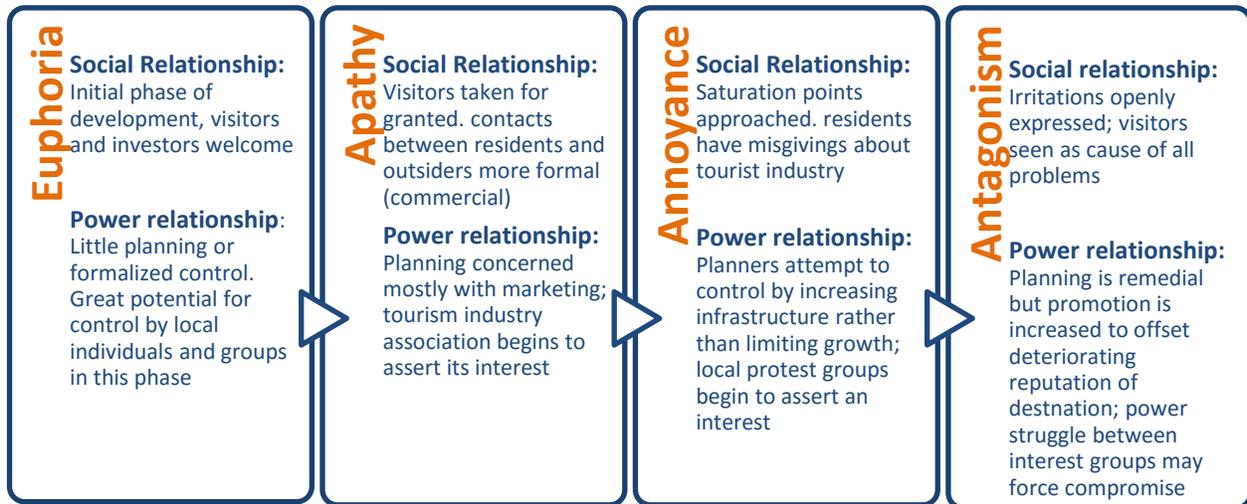
Ecological

Due to the presence of wetlands and the Black-necked crane habitat, Phobjika bears huge ecological significance. Therefore, one would expect stringent management to protect its ecological status; unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case on the ground. The natural environment has been successful in attracting visitors and boosting tourism development in Gangtey Phobji. However, in the process, the wetland and the ecology seems to have been disturbed to quite an extent - vehicular roads made of concrete runs across the wetland, and settlements have increased substantially disturbing the natural flow of water to the main valley, leading to a considerable drop in the water table. This is apparent from the many spots of dry areas which would otherwise be marshy. The streams were contaminated with solid waste. While the landfill remains full, the garbage collection has been discontinued because the tractor for garbage collection is nonfunctional. Due to these problems there is no proper waste management. Water contamination is increasing. A contamination source is the untreated gray water produced by accommodation facilities, especially the laundry. In addition, there is intensive use of chemical fertilizers for potato cultivation. Stray horses released in the area for free range grazing also impacts the valley, adding to the pressure on the environment. Overall the beautiful natural landscape that has attracted many visitors is indiscreetly being impaired. There is no doubt a high impact from the increased anthropogenic activities. The enlistment of Phobjikha as a Ramsar site is expected to call for tougher environmental obligations.

Socioeconomic

The increasing number of tourist to Gangtey Phobji is creating significant impacts on the socioeconomic conditions of the people. There is a mixed feeling on deriving the benefits of tourism. The major beneficiaries of the village home stays were the houses located in Gangtey, due to their proximity and convenience for the visitors. Although home stays at Phobji derived little benefits, they were still appreciative of the support and awareness they gained which improved their living conditions in the house. Improved road connectivity has helped alleviate the farmers' hardship making marketing easier for their farm produce, especially potatoes. However, the increasing visitation and its development are beginning to make the local residents feel that they are not getting the expected benefits from tourism. Thus, in the process, some resentment is increasing due to the sacrifices made for the conservation of the wetland and Black Necked Cranes. The locals feel restricted due to conservation regulations, while developers like the hoteliers, most of whom are non-residents, are not impacted. They feel deprived of electric fencing, which is discouraged due to its expected adverse impact on Cranes, while they are continuously confronted with wildlife predation on their crops. The women's group that was created by RSPN has almost become defunct as their sale of LPG has become unworkable. Souvenir production, too, has been hampered due to lack of a market area. As tourism develops rapidly, so too do the mindset of the local residents, a phenomenon outlined in Doxey's irridex, which explains the effects of tourism development on the social relationship between visitors and host community.

Doxey's level of host irritation also known as Doxey's Irridex which is a casual model of the effects of tourism developments on the social relationships between visitors and the host. It would be good for local communities to have control over developments from the start.



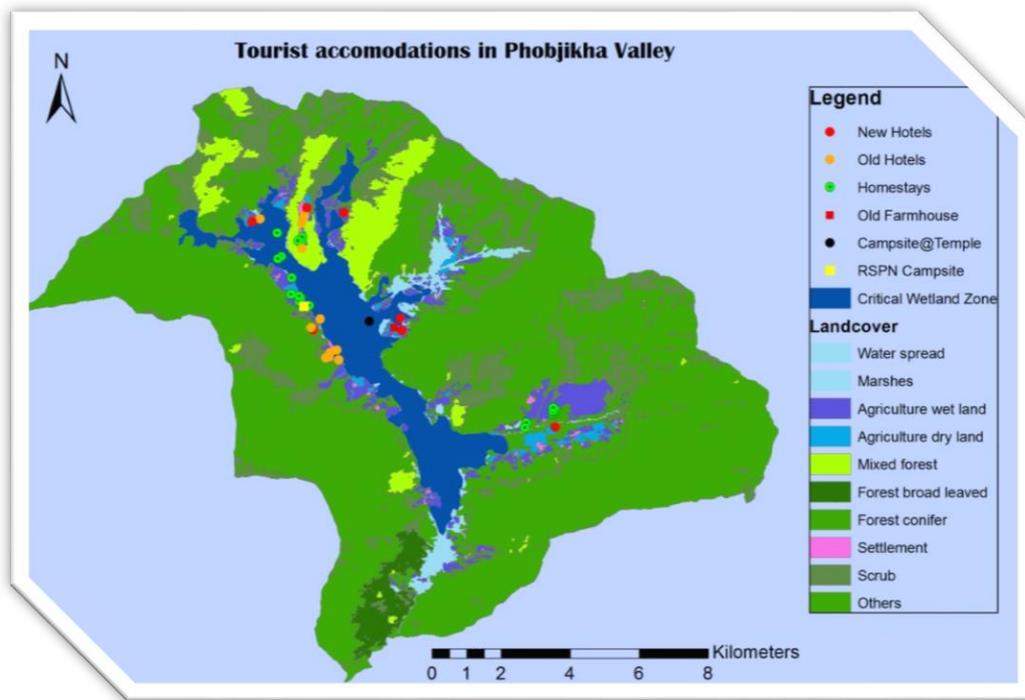
Infrastructure

The increasing visitation numbers to the area has stimulated the growth of infrastructure especially the accommodations facilities. In addition to the list provided in the table given below there are other hotels expected to be constructed in the near future as land has been sold to tourism operators/investors. There are in total 22 home stays in operation and there are more farmers interested to also register. While there are some regulations with home stays, there seems to be no regulations on the hotels - no monitoring on the operations of the existing hotels, as well as the newly constructed ones. The local representatives are not involved in the approval process. Road network, too, has increased connecting almost all the villages. Many years ago, the Phobjikha Primary school (now upgraded to Middle Secondary) was located in the wetland valley and it was successfully relocated to conserve the wetland. However it is ironical now to see concrete roads for free movement of vehicles running through the wetlands. Public toilets made of concrete have been constructed within the wetlands, and a board walk in dilapidated condition runs through part of the wetland. Basically all the constructions lack following proper environmental standards.

List of accommodation facilities

S.No	Existing (in operation) Hotels	S. No	Hotels under construction
1	AmanKora	1	Six Senses
2	Dewachen	2	Below Esa school
3	Phuntsho Choling Farm House	3	Above Khewang Lhakhang
4	Yoloki Guest House	4	Behind Khewang lhankhang
5	Gakiling guest house	5	Near Yoloki lodge
6	Wangchuk lodge	6	Tangana near AmanKora
7	Gangtey lodge	7	Greener resort
8	Padmasambava lodge	In addition there are others who have	
9	Thegchenphodrang guest house	acquired land for building hotels.	
10	Nga Yapling farm lodge		

Homestays: presently 22 homestays are in operation while there are more applicants interested to register



(Courtesy: Jigme Tshering, RSPN)

Policy/Management

While it is good to see tourism development pick up in Phobjikha it is equally important to ensure that there are proper guidelines and management mechanisms in place to ensure that development and conservation move together. Unfortunately, there is a major imbalance, with development greatly superseding conservation of the natural environment. Due to the pressure of developers, RSPN too is finding it very difficult to promote good practices. During the consultations with the

government authorities, it was found that while there are certain policy tools in place, what was lacking was the monitoring in the field. Designated as an International Ramsar site tougher regulations are expected to be implemented. The Gangtey Phobji Environmental Management Committee (GPEMC), with its members from different stakeholders, forms a critical link in acting as a bridge between the people and the authorities. Unfortunately, it was observed that the committee was almost becoming defunct. The members lacked motivation as they believe the committee lacked any authority and their roles were neither recognized nor their voices heard.

Overview of key issues/findings

Ecological	Socioeconomic	Infrastructure	Management / Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant disturbance • Lowering water table • No proper Garbage management • Contamination of wetland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less benefit to resident community • Community resentment to conservation rising due to development restrictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncontrolled growth • Use of environmentally unfriendly materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulations weak or non-existent • Weak monitoring • User zone not properly delineated



RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the situation in Phobjikha valley, there is an urgency to manage the impacts. The glory of Phobjikha valley as a beautiful and pristine place is fading and proper management needs to be given top priority to sustainably enhance conservation and development. The following management interventions need to be pursued at the earliest.

Policy/regulations for management

The current tourism development situation demands the application of proper regulations on the ground. Infrastructure development, especially hotel constructions and operations need some serious attention. Policy guidelines need to be developed and enforced to ensure responsible conduct for such development activities. The hoteliers and investors cannot be blamed if there is no proper guidance or conditions in place. The design of the property and materials used for construction need to consider the environment and, should be accordingly monitored. Stringent regulations need to be in place for standard operation procedures of the hotels, lest there will be a risk of increasingly more activities both for tourism and socio-economic development, which will add more pressure on the natural environment. For example, threat from electric and TV cables, desire for electric fencing, use of pesticides for agriculture, etc. Regulations need to be enforced at the earliest to mitigate any further negative impacts. Further the Hotel Classification standards implemented by Tourism Council of Bhutan needs to have special clauses and criterion for hotels in such ecologically sensitive places. Guidelines for the development of home stays need to be made transparent and aware.

Strengthening Coordination and Partnerships

RSPN's dedicated work as an NGO towards the protection of Phobjikha is being met with challenges resulting from the increasing developmental activities in the area. The need for the other sectors to work together to support RSPN is urgently required. Some years ago, the Gangtey Phobji Environmental Management Committee (GPEMC) which was well represented by all sectors played an instrumental role in coordination and management. However the recent situation ascertains that the GPEMC has become almost defunct and powerless. This committee needs to be revitalized and empowered. Furthermore, representation from the hoteliers and home stays also needs to be included. The committee needs to be directly linked to the Dzongkhag head office where the Dzongda should be appraised on all its proceedings. This would not only help in recognizing the role of the GPEMC but also support and empower it. While this strategy would help coordination at the field level it is equally important for coordination and partnerships at the Head offices in Thimphu. The key agencies like the National Environment Commission (NEC), Department of Forests and Parks especially the Watershed Management Division and Wangdue Territorial Division, Tourism Council of Bhutan, Hotels & Restaurant Association of Bhutan, Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators, Guides Association of Bhutan, and RSPN need to work together as a team to support sustainable tourism development in Phobjikha conservation area.

Socio-economic benefits

Although there seems to be some significant benefits to the local community, these benefits remain confined to only a few village home stays. Many other opportunities for community benefit are not being enhanced. It is necessary to link them to the tourism value chain. The large numbers of hotels is an opportunity for local people to supply agriculture produce, benefit from employment, etc. however all these are presently remain as missed opportunities. The corporate social responsibility by the investors in the valley needs to be increased. The resentment of the local community seems to be on the rise as they see themselves at the losing end of economic benefits, exacerbated by the environmental conservation regulations, which they see as most restrictive to them and their livelihood development. As hotels have the potential to create economic benefits to the local community they need to take added initiative and responsibility to contribute to the valley. Forming a Gangtey Phobji Hotel Association could be a starting point for them to become more actively engaged.

Visitor management and use zone

Phobjikha valley, with its status as the largest wetland in Bhutan, the habitat for the maximum number of Cranes, and more recently declared as a Ramsar site, deserves to have a proper visitor management plan in place. Guidelines need to be developed for code of conduct, outlining the dos and don'ts in the area. Use area needs to be clearly delineated and signage put in place to enforce responsible actions. Movement of vehicles needs to be regulated. Ideally the plan should have few designated spots for parking motor vehicles. Solar powered carts could be used to shuttle luggage to the hotels. Now with the possibility of travelling by chopper, it is also necessary to ensure that chopper landing spots are appropriately designated. For instance, the school ground is currently used, and locals have reported the frantic behavior of the Black Necked Cranes with the chopper landing at the school ground. Proper landing space needs to be designated further away from the valley to avoid disturbance.

Infrastructure development

There is a rapid increase in the development of infrastructure which includes hotels and roads. These are happening in an almost uncontrolled manner. Since all of these constructions are happening on private land, government representatives feel that they have no right to exert control. The construction of roads too, bears no sensitivity to the environment. Eco friendly infrastructure development needs to be pursued.

Diversify Research

Research, both social and ecological, needs to be intensified to collect more evidence of impacts. Focusing on water quality should be a priority, because its findings may be used to determine the development of infrastructure and activities in and around the wetland. These need to be used as important indicators, rather than relying only on BNC, which does not seem to be adequate to justify the biological importance of the area. In undertaking research the citizen science approach

could be followed whereby the general public and community can be involved in the research with the professionals. This will instill a sense of ownership, interest and responsibility in protecting the place.

Demarketing

Marketing for tourism destinations is critical to promote and increase visitation. However, considering the present situation with accumulating negative impacts that needs attention in an ecologically sensitive destination like Phobjikha valley a demarketing strategy may be necessary. The present operations are detrimental not only to the natural environment but also to the socio-cultural aspects of the area. Demarketing is that aspect of marketing that deals with discouraging customers in general or a certain class of customers in particular on either a temporary or permanent basis (Kotler and Levy, 1971:76). In protected areas specifically, demarketing is concerned with reducing visitor numbers in total or selectively *and* redistributing demand spatially or temporarily. (Christine Luise Kern, 2006 – Demarketing as a tool for managing visitor demand in national parks of Australia).

All the above recommendations are eventually reliant on an effective monitoring plan which is presented under Part C of the report.

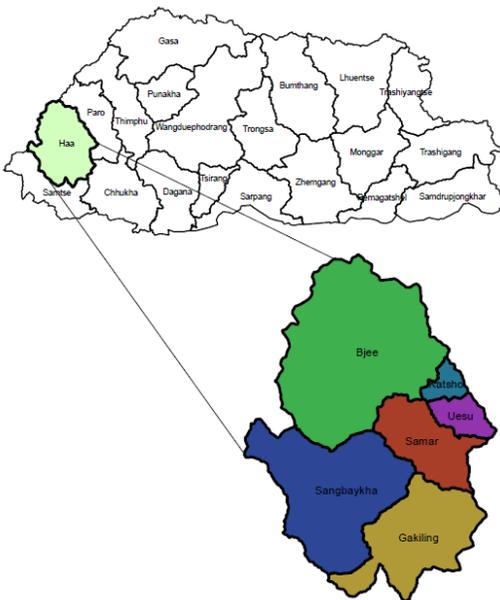
Part B: HAA



Source: wikipedia

Description and Status of Tourism Development.

Haa is the western most district of Bhutan sharing international borders with India to the west and China to the north. It consists of six gewogs (Bjee, Katsho, Esu, Sama, Sombaykha and Gakiling).



Haa has very rich cultural and natural heritage. It has unique culture and traditions influenced mainly by their guardian deity Ap Chundu. The climate at Haa is not too favorable for agricultural cropping and livestock rearing, making tourism one of the best alternatives for supplementary income. Haa was officially open to International visitors for tourism from 2002. In 2015 the tourist visitation number to Haa was at 3,815 guests, which was almost 25% more than 2014, and was an increase from the total visitation numbers for 2013 which was 2,812 guests (TCB). This shows the interest to visit Haa is increasing. Despite its relative proximity to Thimphu, Paro and Phuentsholing, Haa is still able to project the image of remoteness and isolation. Recognizing the potential in

Haa RSPN, has taken the initiative of promoting community based sustainable tourism (CBST) development in Haa. This initiative was undertaken in partnership with the Japan Environmental Education Forum (JEEF) funded by the Japanese Technical Cooperation under the JICA partnership program. Programs included the development of village homestays, training of local

guides, building skills for souvenir making, and development of visitor/information centre. It was implemented in three gewogs of Bjee, Esu and Katsho. These three gewogs are located on the northern part of the Dzongkhag as can be seen from the map. Communities of these gewogs are very supportive of RSPN's initiative of CBST and hopeful to derive economic benefits.

Cultural resource attraction	Natural resource attraction	Auxiliary services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pantheon of deities with Ap Chundu as the protective deity of Haa • Many monasteries like lhakhnag karmo, narpo, etc.. • Predominantly rural landscape • Many local festivals • Distinct local cuisine like hontoe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural landscape with abundance of forest cover and presence of white poppy endemic to Haa • Meri phunseum mountain • High mountain passes and lakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good condition road network with several access points - paro airport, Thimphu, Phunstholing, Samchi • Village homestays and camping sites • Trekking and hiking trails



KEY FINDINGS / CONCERNS

Though gifted with both a rich natural and cultural heritage, the latter could prove more attractive for Haa, especially considering the sacred geography of this dzongkhag, which many believe to be an abode of deities. Within this pantheon, Ap Chundu is considered as the guardian of Haa and there are many local festivals associated with the deities. The quality of the roads leading into Haa and its close proximity to Thimphu and Paro should guarantee a fairly high visitation number, although this is not the case as Haa struggles to get a viable number of overnight tourists. The key findings related to tourism development within the parameters of ecological, socioeconomic, infrastructure, and policy/management is the following:

Ecological

The reverence for the local deities has a strong positive influence in the protection of the natural environment. It is believed that any disturbance or disrespect to the natural environment would provoke the local deity to cause misfortune to the individual and the community. Such beliefs contribute to the conservation of the natural environment. An example is the proposal to undertake mining at the hill besides Wangtsa village which was disapproved by the locals in the fear of displeasing the deities. People fear the deities' retribution. Instead rituals need to be conducted to seek blessing and support from these deities'. These strong beliefs have bonded the people to the natural environment. As of now the natural environment is in good condition and no major adverse impacts or concerns were observed. The natural state of the landscape, with the abundance of trees and vegetation makes Haa attractive to visitors. However, with rapid development in Paro and Thimphu the exploitation of the forests is increasing. The intact natural forest in Haa is seen as a source of timber supply influencing the maximum number of registered sawmills being established in Haa. The increased infrastructure development including farm roads and national highways will add pressure to the ecology of the place. Increase in garbage too without proper management will have adverse impacts on the natural environment.

Socioeconomic

The limitations and hardships in agriculture cropping and livestock rearing makes tourism development a viable income earning alternate. Due to the potential for tourism development, the expectations for economic benefits are high. Since tourism development is still at its early stages Haa is yet to embark on a big tourism development scheme, though the process has started and is picking up. RSPN's initiative and support is instrumental in creating awareness and capacity building. The village homestays started by RSPN and TCB are proving to be a good economic incentive to supplement the income of the farmers. However in some cases the success is influencing commercial interest whereby the actual character of a village home stay is being lost. Besides the home stays, RSPN has taken initiative in promoting capacity in local guiding and souvenir making. At this inception stage of tourism development, it will be necessary to identify relevant stakeholders and engage their participation. The enthusiasm demonstrated by the youth especially for local guiding is encouraging and is likely motivated by their high expectations in deriving economic benefits.

Infrastructure

Development of infrastructure plays an important role for tourism development. Most of the villages, monasteries, and tourist visitation sites are connected by motor roads. Besides the homestays, Haa has only few hotels to cater to tourist accommodation. In addition, there are unutilized campsites, and signages appear randomly placed at the chelela pass.

Policy/management

Haa is keen to focus on tourism development but the Dzongkhag lacks support from stakeholders except RSPN, whose efforts is making a positive contribution to Haa. Since tourism development is at its inception stage, it will be critical for mobilizing the concerted effort of all relevant stakeholders to plan and manage its proper development. The formation of the CBST group is in the process. It was observed that waste management like elsewhere needed attention. Regional tourists with high volume visitation numbers will need to be properly regulated to ensure that positive benefits are derived while negative impacts are minimized.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Haa, though at the initial stages of tourism development, should not be complacent in its planning. Instead, it should take it as an opportunity to prepare itself well by investing in good planning, so that the local community may reap the benefits of sustainable tourism development. As a fairly new destination the following recommendations are suggested for its overall development.

Accommodation/Services and Infrastructure Development

Homestays: While it is encouraging to see the benefits obtained by homestay owners some interventions, such as in pricing, are still necessary. Rather than fixing the room and food rates uniformly for all the home stays, a price range is suggested so that accordingly it can leave room for competition to charge at the higher range for better services. The rates and other relevant information of the home stay should be displayed in the house for guests to see. Monitoring must be done to ensure that homestays maintain the conditions in operating as home stays and not change to lodges or hotels for which there are different conditions to follow. In order to create more economic viability for the homestays, the Dzongkhag can assist in its promotions by asking that officials coming to Haa for meetings and other events be put up in these homestays instead of Dzongkhag guest houses.

FDI Investors: At present there are no FDI investors in hotels and other facilities in Haa but it is likely that with the given tourism opportunities there will be a growing market for FDIs. The Dzongkhag should prescribe conditions for investors to make sure that they make significant contributions to the upkeep of the natural and cultural heritage, and offer socio-economic benefits to the local communities. It was noted that investors in Phobjika valley had very little to no links with the local community; this should be avoided in Haa and the Dzongkhag should set these conditions clearly from its inception.

Campsites: campsites need to designated and developed at the right places unlike the one in Yangthang village, which has been built with substantial funds but never been used. In the village areas, campsites should not be built to create opportunities for using home stays. Instead campsites need to be developed along the trekking routes for Nobtshonapata trek, Meriphunsem, Sagala to Chelela, and other areas as and when identified.

Visitor Center: A visitor center is under construction. This will make Haa the first Dzongkhag to have a visitor information center. Its management will be critical for enhancing CBST development in Haa. As such, while the construction is ongoing it will be useful to already start working on developing a business plan for successful utilization of the center. The center should not only be a place to disseminate information on visitation sites in the Dzongkhag, but should also serve as a place of interest with interactive activities to demonstrate traditional products etc. Further the purpose of the center should not only be for visitors but also serve as an educational hub for school children and general public of Haa.

Signages: Signages inadvertently have the potential to create the first impressions of the place. They can play a vital role in enhancing visitor experience. Interpretive signages are educational and provide learning opportunities through the information presented. Interpretation should make visitors feel connected and inspired. While signages can enrich the visitor's experience, it should be not being over done or else the authenticity of the surrounding is diluted. At the same time, since the tours will be guided, signages should be kept to fulfill the minimum requirement. Some of the important considerations recommended in developing signs are:

- Design- This includes the materials used, the color, and the shape and size. These should blend in with the surrounding;
- Information- should be short and concise using appropriate size fonts. Wherever possible pictorial should be used; and
- Location of the sign - Appropriate spots needs to be selected to install the sign. Location for directional signs are pretty straight forward but for regulatory and interpretative signs their locations should be smartly selected so that it can be conveniently seen by visitors. It should not obscure the scenery or any sight of interest.

In recognition of the importance of signages, the CBST management for Haa Dzongkhag should incorporate guidelines for its construction. As an example the advertisement signs at places like Chelela could be done in a better manner or if possible done away with so that visitors can enjoy a more natural experience.

Restrooms and amenities: In order to minimize negative impacts and also protect the sanctity of the environment, it is important to plan for proper restrooms and amenities along the routes and visitation sites. These provisions can be constrained by financial paucity but nevertheless it will be important to prioritize few popular visitation sites and accordingly, source funding for its provision. An example is Chelela pass, which is a popular visitation site. However due to lack of a restroom the area is soiled with human waste and garbage. Upon securing financial support for these provisions a management plan to ensure its proper maintenance and management should be developed and implemented.

Waste management: like elsewhere in the country indiscreet disposal of solid waste is a problem. With increased visitation numbers this problem can be further escalate. A strategy for its awareness and proper management is necessary. RSPN should revive their working relationships with the schools through the nature clubs. Developing a strategy involving the schools and local communities is recommended.

We must be aware that the objective of infrastructure development should be to enhance visitor appreciation and experience. This means the development of infrastructure should be kept to the bare minimum and undertaken only if absolutely necessary. It should add value to the existing cultural and natural landscape rather than impacting adversely. The few infrastructures that will need to be built should use local materials as far as possible and be eco-friendly in keeping with the cultural and natural landscape.

Product development

Considering the rich cultural and natural heritage of Haa it is only logical that the primary aim of tourism development should contribute to the preservation and upkeep of this rich heritage. Some recommendations for this are:

Revival of old festivals: Haa has several unique local festivals which seem to be disappearing. Tourism development is probably the only option to revive these age old festivals. Rather than inventing new festivals to attract tourists it would be far wiser to spend the resources in reviving the old ones. It seems an inventory of these festivals have already been documented in the past studies. It will be good to compile them and create a list of festivals in Haa and make them known to public, especially the local tour operators.

Up keep of traditional landscape: Haa with beautiful valleys dotted with hamlets presents an authentic rural ambiance with majority of the houses in traditional structure. This traditional landscape makes Haa very attractive for visitors. However with increasing economic development this situation is changing. While change is inevitable the requirement to follow traditional designs that blend with the rural surrounding should be made mandatory. Aware of these changes and the threat it poses to the cultural landscape the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs (MoHCA) had selected Katsho village as a case study under its program in promoting Cultural Landscape and Sustaining its Significance (CLSS) in 2015. Such initiatives should be further pursued.

Promotion of rural crafts and souvenirs: RSPN, with the support of trainers from APIC has already started training locals in reviving the development of local craft. While tourism presents the opportunity to revive and strengthen the promotion of our local arts and craft, it needs to be promoted in a manner that meets this objective. The situation in Paro, for instance, warrants some concern as most of the crafts sold in their many handicraft stores

are replications from India and Nepal. This does not offer any motivation for local handicrafts and thus in the process does not encourage its production. Haa has the potential to be different and should not follow this trend. In fact Haa should only allow locally produced handicrafts to be sold which will not only provide economic benefits to the locals but also serve the well-intended purpose of reviving and promoting local arts and craft.

Protection of the natural heritage: The natural heritage is an integral part of the unique cultural heritage of Haa. They share a symbiotic relationship. The forests and natural resources need to be protected and sustainably used. However, Haa records the maximum number of timber sawmills in the country. This is a concern and the authorities need to ensure that over exploitation of the forests is avoided. The people of Haa have a strong reverence for the forests as the abode of many of the deities. These traditional beliefs should be respected and not overcome by short term economic benefits.

Promotion of eco activities: The pristine state of the natural and cultural landscape in Haa makes it ideal for developing soft adventure eco activities, including but not limited to birding watching, fly fishing with support from the fish farm, day hikes and trekking through old routes, pilgrimage tours visiting monasteries, rafting, biking, paragliding, and horse riding.

Capacity Building/Awareness and empowerment of local community

As Haa is an emerging tourism destination, it is important that the residents and local people become aware of the opportunities and pitfalls of tourism development, and their roles in it. Building their capacity to understand and participate is important; however unreasonable expectations should not be raised. RSPN has already conducted some training sessions for local guiding, souvenir making and home stays. More trainings and awareness creation is still required to build the skills and confidence of the people. These opportunities can empower the local community. The rural ambience in Haa is one of the central attractions for visitors, and the local community is a vital part of this. As such, empowering the locals will motivate them to participate and stay in control of tourism development. The situation in Phobhjikha valley should be avoided where the local communities seem to be losing control and ownership over their area, while the external investors derive much more benefits.

Marketing

Though there are opportunities to visit Haa the number of night halt visitors are only a handful compared to the day visitors. This is because of the perception that there is really nothing to do in Haa. This perception exists due to weak marketing. Therefore marketing needs to be enhanced. A marketing strategy needs to be developed to help in changing the perception of Haa. Some of the immediate marketing programs recommended are

conducting familiarization tours for tour operators, producing information materials like booklets and brochures, providing itineraries and contacts in the RSPN website or other online opportunities. Marketing of the village homestays in the RSPN website by not only providing their contacts but presenting a profile of each household with a picture and brief history of the family of the homestay. This additional information would help encourage guests choose homestays as per their interest.

Planning and management

Good planning and management is the key to successful implementation of sustainable tourism. Some suggestions to achieve this in Haa are:

Formation of management committee: a management committee needs to be instituted in the Dzongkhag with representation from relevant stakeholders. Presently RSPN has a project steering committee for community based sustainable tourism. It is good to start tourism development from the point of focusing on communities, but the focus of the management committee should not solely be community based to ensure that there are more available options. Formation of the committee based on a business model will help it sustain the management instead of replicating the model in Phobjikha which had high reliance to projects to sustain its management. The committee should not only have clear roles and responsibilities, but also bear accountability for tourism development in the Dzongkhag. The tourism management committee should be institutionalized within the Dzongkhag administration which would help empower the committee and be recognized.

Creating platforms for coordination: the driving force for sustainable tourism is partnerships between all relevant stakeholders. Recognizing the importance of coordination, it is vital to create platforms as opportunities to strengthen partnerships. Periodic meetings, workshops etc. should be planned by the Dzongkhag with good representation of relevant stakeholders.

Review of tourism master plan: The tourism master plan developed by the Dzongkhag in 2010 will need to be reviewed. An action plan taking into consideration all recent developments and future aspirations should be developed.

Monitoring: Planning and management becomes ineffective without a periodic monitoring plan. Monitoring will provide good information for planning and management. The last section of this report presents a monitoring framework.

Part C: MONITORING FRAMEWORK

Monitoring is an essential part of planning and management, for without it one will not know the progress and impacts towards the objectives, and this, it is fundamental to achieving sustainability. As such an effective monitoring system is imperative to be developed and implemented. Monitoring is the process to regularly observe and check the progress of something over a period of time using indicators.

Before examining the practical steps involved in setting up and running a monitoring programme the main monitoring considerations need to be understood. A brief introduction on this is provided below (adopted from SNV - a toolkit for monitoring and managing community based tourism).

- *Examining the rationale for monitoring:* In general terms, establishing whether or not the project is living up to expectations, and in what areas it is performing better or worse than expected, helps engage stakeholders in the project, helps justify funding extensions, and helps to bring about productive change. Having access to up-to-date information enables project managers to adapt their management practices to suit changing circumstances, experiment with new approaches, and learn from the results. When things are going less well, monitoring can provide an early-warning system, enabling managers to take corrective action in particular areas before it is too late. Monitoring of CBT projects is therefore crucial to their long-term success.
- *Deciding who should monitor:* There are opportunities for stakeholder participation at each phase in the development and implementation of a monitoring cycle. The more diverse stakeholder involvement becomes, the greater the learning outcomes of the programme are likely to be - In the initial planning phase, key participants are likely to be local officials, planners, development consultants, and donor agencies working in close consultation with community groups; In the development phase, there are greater opportunities for wide community involvement as key issues are assessed and indicators selected; In the data collection phase community members and tourism industry representatives can be trained in the collection of data (such as number and type of birds spotted on a trail and visitor satisfaction); In the implementation phase, the establishment of a small multi-stakeholder working group can be helpful for overseeing the monitoring and analysis of the results. This will give a degree of independence from political leadership and help to avoid conflicts of interest and differing interpretations of results.
- *Discussing what to monitor:* It is not possible to monitor every part of a CBT project, and in some cases having too much information may be as bad as having no information at all. Working out what to monitor is therefore a crucial part of the development of a monitoring programme. Two approaches are proposed. First is the “business performance approach”. It involves monitoring progress against established CBT business goals. These are the goals that

will have been developed at the outset of the project, such as to raise US\$5000 in revenue for a community project or to provide 10 full-time jobs. The second is the “sustainable performance approach”. It involves monitoring progress in the context of key sustainable development or poverty-related issues facing the community. These may include increasing access to clean running water, increasing the proportion of households with one or more member in formal employment, or increasing the number of homes with garbage collection. The job of sustainable tourism indicators is to show the effect of tourism on the community’s sustainable development goals. Different organizations may prefer one approach over another. Project managers may prefer the business approach, to check how they are performing against their bottom line. NGOs may prefer the key issue approach, in order to get an overall understanding of the contribution the project is making to sustainable development in the community. Both are essential to sustainability.

➤ *Thinking about the type of indicators to be used:* There are three main types of indicators: qualitative, quantitative, and normative.

- Qualitative indicators rely on value-based assessments (what people think) of the state of a particular issue such as residents’ views on tourists, tourists’ level of satisfaction, or experts’ descriptions of the state of a particular ecosystem;
- Quantitative indicators are focused on specific, measurable facts. They involve the counting of specific events in a scientific fashion. These are normally expressed as percentages (20% of guides are certified), ratios (e.g. ratio of resident numbers compared to tourist numbers), or as raw data (e.g. 900 liters of water used per guest night);
- Normative indicators measure the existence or non-existence of some element such as a tourism plan or an environmental policy. These are less useful in terms of sustainability unless they are linked to other indicators which measure how effective the plans or policies are.

In addition to these divisions, the UNWTO highlights the following types of indicators.

UNWTO Indicator Types

- Early-warning indicators (e.g. decline in the number of repeat visitors)
- Indicators of system stress (e.g. water shortages, crime incidents)
- Measures of the current state of the industry (e.g. occupancy rates, number of employees)
- Measures of the impact of tourism development on the biophysical and socio-economic environment (e.g. levels of pollution, congestion, loss of cultural heritage, income for local communities)
- Measures of management response (e.g. Number of tourism awareness programmes run, guides)

Source: Adapted from UNWTO (2004)

- *Reviewing the human and financial resources available:* Data collection can be costly and time consuming. Serious thought needs to be given to the availability of resources to carry out CBT monitoring prior to beginning the design process. This will help encourage practical and efficient monitoring solutions. It is important to note that indicators that are easy to measure may not always be those that contribute greatest understanding. In each monitoring project, tradeoffs will need to be made between the need for high quality monitoring, the involvement of stakeholders, and the need to produce indicators that are cost-effective and available in a reasonable timeframe. The cost of a monitoring project will be related to the size and scale of the project or destination it is designed to monitor. An easy rule of thumb is that 2-3% of the cost of the project should be allocated to monitoring at the project's outset. In this way the larger and more complex the tourism project, the more extensive and costly the monitoring process is. A US\$100,000 programme, should allocate about US\$2-3000 a year for monitoring activities. Often there is a reluctance to spend money on monitoring, as it appears to be diverting money from programmes of action. This is an unhelpful attitude as monitoring has substantial value in terms of making actions effective. The human resources required for monitoring are dependent on the scale of the programme and on the frequency of data collection. Establishing a monitoring programme is a relatively labor intensive process and may take two or more people several months, but once the programme is in place, one person should be able to collect the data over the period of a month once or twice a year.
- *Considering how to communicate monitoring results to stakeholders:* Communication is frequently overlooked in monitoring programmes. To make a difference, indicator results need to be communicated to stakeholders in an easily understood and transparent manner. This process allows the community to learn from past experiences and to improve CBT tourism as a result. It also helps ensure that tourism generates benefits for the poor. Every monitoring programme must therefore have a clear plan for how to communicate results to stakeholders.

Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC)

Recognizing that sustainable tourism development at Phobjikha and Haa requires considerations to managing impacts the approach for monitoring is recommended to be based on limits of acceptable change. The framework of Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) incorporates the consideration of carrying capacity and considers other potential underlying causes of impact. It is a decision process that addresses unacceptable impacts to resource conditions and visitor experiences in protected areas. The LAC involves determining whether levels of existing impact at a site are unacceptable, selecting management strategies and tactics, developing an action plan and carrying it out, and monitoring. As with any approach, planning for monitoring occurs early and monitoring happens throughout the process. When monitoring indicates that the threshold of unacceptable impact has occurred, management action is taken. Carrying capacity is aimed at deciding *how many people/visits* a resource can sustain, while LAC tries to define *how much*

change is acceptable as a result of those visits and how to address it. The LAC assists in specifying the scope, severity, and cause of the problem ideally before it becomes unacceptable. It encourages managers to assess a range of alternatives rather than being locked in to one solution. It is a flexible system that may be tailored to the specific ecology, biodiversity, or socio-cultural considerations of each site.

The LAC approach is based on three major assumptions:

- Impact is inevitable, so the focus is on identifying how much impact is acceptable;
- Different sites will have different environments and social conditions;
- A given level of tourism may have different impacts in these different situations.

The LAC process was originally developed by the United States Forest Service for use in forested terrestrial habitats. It is now in wide use in a variety of other locales, including many marine parks. South African National Parks have developed a similar method, based on what is termed “Thresholds for Potential Concern” for determining when management intervention is needed in a certain situation.

LAC follows a 9 steps planning system to determine the LAC as shown in the figure below (adapted from Wallace, 1993)



Limits of acceptable conditions are defined by the standards that are monitored with the selected social and environmental indicators. If standards are exceeded, appropriate and effective management interventions are evaluated.

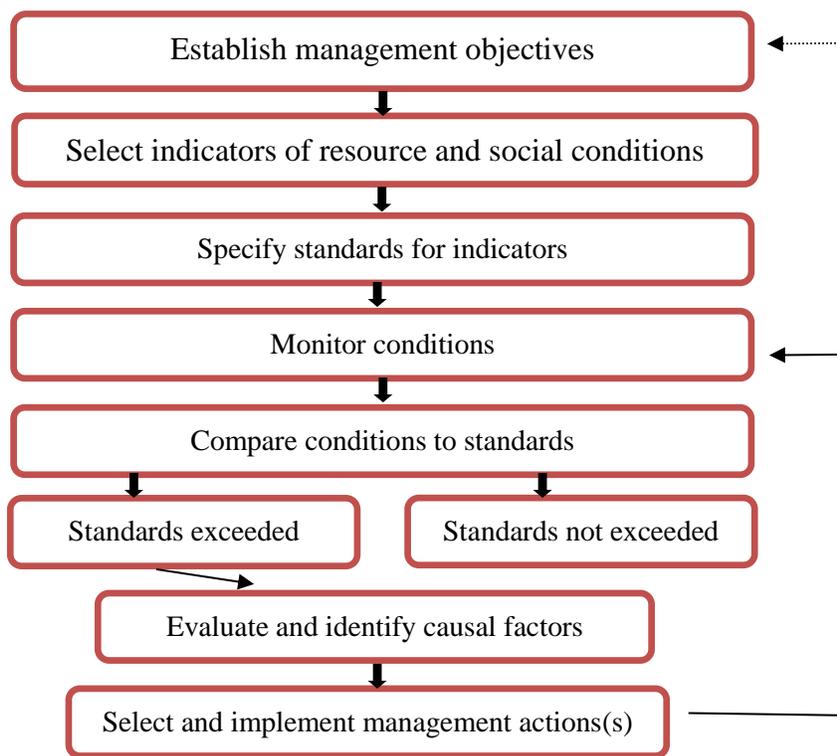


Diagram illustrating the basic stages of management planning frameworks (adopted from Siikamaki and Kangas – LAC Oulanka National Park)

Action plan for areas of concern in the project sites

Based on the study findings the key areas of concern and their plan of action are presented below for the two project sites.

Phobjikha Conservation Area		
Area of concern	Action plan	Relevant agencies
1. <i>Zonation and visitor management</i> : there is weak/lack of proper zoning for recreational use. Visitors too need guidance for proper conduct especially the growing numbers of regional tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Zonation needs to be done with proper management prescriptions and regulated; - Code of conduct for visitors developed and made aware; - Visitor fee introduced for community welfare 	RSPN, DoFPS, TCB, ABTO, Dzongkhag administration, Local community, local Government.

<p>2. <i>Wetland contamination and degradation:</i> Due to high development activities and increase in visitation the ecological state of the area is under threat.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regulations need to be developed for proper treatment of waste water from the hotels especially laundry water; - Need to ensure that the pesticides used for agriculture are within limits of acceptance; - Activities that have the potential to degrade the wetland should not be allowed example request for automobile workshop etc. 	<p>RSPN, WMD (DoFPs), Hoteliers, DoA, NEC, Dzongkhag administration, Local community, Local Government.</p>
<p>3. <i>Garbage management:</i> some years ago the valley had a tractor that collected garbage but presently no collection. In the process there is no proper waste management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Source funding for waste collection vehicle; - Identity new land fill site; - Start segregation of waste; - Declare the Gangtey Phobji valley as a plastic free area; - Develop waste mgt plan. 	<p>RSPN, DoFPS, NEC, Dzongkhag administration, Local community, Local Government, Donor agencies.</p>
<p>4. <i>Infrastructure development:</i> there is a steep rise in infrastructure development especially hotels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enforce regulations for following environmentally friendly standards; - Need to enforce limitations to number of hotels considering the fragility of the ecosystem; - Constructions of toilets, walking trails, roads, camp sites should not be permitted in the wetland; - Consent of local people sought for any development. 	<p>RSPN, DoFPS, TCB, Dzongkhag administration, GPEMC, Local community, Local Government.</p>
<p>5. <i>Coordination:</i> with the increasing activities in the valley the coordination is weak.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordination mechanisms to be developed at the National and local levels; - Hold a national workshop to alert on the situation and enhance partnerships. 	<p>GPEMC, DoFPS, NEC, TCB, RSPN, Dzongkhag Administration</p>
<p>6. <i>Vehicle movements:</i> increased vehicle movements in the wetland with roads developed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designated parking to be developed for visitor vehicles; - Implement vehicle movement timings for tourists. 	<p>GPEMC, RSPN, WMD, Forest Territorial Division.</p>
<p>7. <i>Regulations and Management:</i> There is weak management and application of regulations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A tourism management plan based on sustainability developed and implemented; 	<p>GPEMC, TCB, Local Government, WMD, RSPN, Forest</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National and district authorities to empower GPEMC and all developmental activities need no objection from this Committee; - GPEMC include local rep from hotels, should meet periodically and proceedings shared with Dzongkhag and National authorities; - Hotel Classification System to have additional criteria for hotel operators; - More stringent regulations to be developed and implemented in keeping with Ramsar member obligation. 	Territorial Division, MoAF.
8. <i>CSR by investors</i> : The investors do not make any significant contribution to the local community and upkeep of the natural resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop conditions for all investors to make minimum contributions to the area in cash and kind. 	GPEMC, Hoteliers, Dzongkhag administration, Local Government.
9. <i>Research</i> : Besides the study on Cranes other research is lacking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initiate research on water quality etc. to indicate the trend and state of the natural environment; - Social research to be conducted. 	DoFPS, RSPN, NEC, Dzongkhag administration, Donor agencies.
10. <i>Stray horses</i> : Many redundant horses released in the area from other places.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Issue to be reported to the District authority for restricting 	GPEMC, Dzongkhag administration, DoL, Local Government.
11. <i>Helipad site</i> : the site presently used by the Chopper below the school causes huge disturbance to the Cranes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate landing site to be identified and designated 	TCB, GPEMC, Helicopter services, RSPN, Local Government.
12. <i>Black Necked Crane festival</i> : Overcrowding during the festival.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A management plan to be developed for conducting the festival to ensure promotion of culture, environment and visitor enjoyment. 	GPEMC, RSPN, Local Government, Local Community.

Haa (Bjee, Esu, and Katsho gewogs)

Area of concern	Action plan	Relevant agencies
1. <i>Product development</i> : need to ensure it is in keeping with promotion of cultural and natural heritage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sale of only local arts and craft; - Develop all products and activities that are culturally sensitive and eco – friendly; - Prepare calendar of local festivals. 	Dzongkhag administration, TCB, RSPN, Local community, Forest and Parks, NRCRLF, Private Entrepreneurs, APIC, Local Government, D-HOPE (MoEA), Donor agencies.
2. <i>Capacity building and awareness on tourism</i> : need to build skills and awareness for tourism development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop training program to build skills; - Create awareness; - Secure funding. 	Dzongkhag administration, TCB, RSPN, Forest and Parks, Local community, Local Government, Donor agencies.
3. <i>Infrastructure development</i> : increasing infrastructure development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop guidelines for infrastructure development; - Design in keeping with cultural and natural landscape; - Promote use of eco-friendly and local materials. 	Dzongkhag administration, TCB, RSPN, Forest and Parks, Local community, Local Government, Donor Agencies.
4. <i>Waste management</i> : increasing waste from visitation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a waste management plan and implement - Create awareness 	RSPN, Dzongkhag administration, Forest and Parks, Local community, Local Government, Donor Agencies.
5. <i>FDI and other local investors</i> : emerging investors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop terms and conditions for investors to contribute to local economy and environment; 	Dzongkhag administration, Local community, Investors, Local Government.
6. <i>Marketing</i> : need of a marketing plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a marketing plan and strategy. 	Dzongkhag administration, TCB, RSPN, Local Community, Local Government, Donor Agencies.
7. <i>Coordination and management</i> : need of effective coordination and management for sustainability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Form a tourism management committee; - Create periodic forums and avenues for meeting and building partnerships. 	Dzongkhag administration, TCB, RSPN, Local Community, Forest and Parks, NRCRL, Private Entrepreneurs, Local Government.

CONCLUSION

The tourism development situation in Phobjika and Haa are at two different stages, and many may note that Phobjika valley has a more urgent need for a monitoring program than Haa. While there may be some truth in that, monitoring should not be seen as a reactive process; rather, the proactive monitoring mechanism should be recognized for its importance in avoiding the pitfalls of tourism development. It is important to have a good monitoring mechanism right from the start. This means the need of monitoring for Haa should not be seen as premature, but timely to be developed and initiated. Adverse impacts can be best avoided if addressed from the beginning with appropriate monitoring mechanism in place.

Monitoring and managing impacts will require concerted efforts of all stakeholders to make it effective. While partnerships will be critical RSPN is in the best position to be instrumental in coordinating this. RSPN's involvement in both the project sites is well recognized. Therefore, RSPN's continued commitment and leadership is crucial to mobilize effective monitoring and management of impacts to achieve sustainable tourism development.

Appendix I – Terms of Reference for consultancy

Background

The community based sustainable tourism project implemented by the Royal Society for Protection of Nature has been designed as a part of the conservation and sustainable livelihood program to harness the tourism potential of Phobjikha Conservation Area and Haa's natural and cultural richness for the benefit of local communities living there. Besides providing opportunity for alternative livelihood source of rural communities, it also contributes to the tourism plan for decentralization and management of tourism at the destination level.

While the project sites in Haa Dzongkhag is focused in the three areas on Bjee, Esu and Kartsho Gewogs designated as *Zone 1* in the Dzongkhag Tourism Development Plan 2010, the Haa Dzongkhag is still a new destination being explored for its potential in tourism development. Phobjikha is one of the most popular tourist destination and at the same time an environmentally significant area for conservation. The rate of anthropogenic activities particularly in relation to tourism development in the area has been increasing indefinitely over the years which warrant understanding of the ecological foot prints and the capacity of the area to accommodate that.

Therefore a carrying capacity of tourism resources in these two areas is required to study and understand the level of human activity relating to tourism that Phobjikha Conservation Area and Haa Dzongkhag can accommodate in the context of the social-ecological environment and visitors experience.

Consultancy Objectives

The objectives of this consultancy are:

- To carry out in-depth study of tourism resources in the project areas (Phobjikha and Haa) and provide understanding in relation to the ecological, socioeconomic, policy and infrastructure factors.
- To develop report that:
 - Determines resources carrying capacity of the project areas.
 - Identifies areas of concern in tourism growth in the project area.
 - Recommends development of action plans and institutional framework for monitoring and evaluation of tourism in the project areas.

Scope of Work

The work mostly focuses on stakeholder consultations from community to national level. It should consist of the following key stages:

- a. Determine process of conducting carrying capacity survey.
- b. Determine questions and indicators for the survey

Specific Tasks and Outputs

- Consultation meetings with stakeholders
- Documentation and assessment of reference materials
- Conduct Field survey
- Present draft report to RSPN and the CBST project steering committee
- Develop final report based on comments and present the final report to the RSPN and the CBST project steering committee

Deliverables

A report on the tourism Capacity Study of Phobjikha Conservation Area, Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag and the Bjee, Kartsho and Esu Gewogs of Haa Dzongkhag.

The consultant should deliver 3 hard copies and a soft copy of the final report to RSPN.

Qualifications

The work shall be consulted to an expert in the field of sustainable tourism and has

- A minimum of masters degree preferably in the relevant field of social science
- Proven experience of leading and facilitating tourism consultation works.
- Proven experience in developing successful process for conducting sustainable tourism assessments and surveys.
- Excellent communication skills for understanding and communicating complex issues and communicating across all levels (community members to national policy)
- Demonstrated understanding of the concept of community based sustainable tourism in relation to nature conservation.

Time and Duration of study

The study is to be conducted for 45 working days spread in a duration of 5 months period starting from 28th November, 2016

The final report should be submitted no later than 28th April, 2017.

Reporting

The consultant(s) will report to Ms. Khachi Wangmo, Project Officer for Community-based Sustainable Tourism project and Mr. Kinga Wangdi, Coordinator for Conservation and Sustainable Livelihood Program, RSPN.

Appendix II – list of people/agency consultation.

S.No	Name	Agency
1	Mr. (Dasho) Sonam Jigme	Dzongdha, Wangdu Dzongkhag
2	Mr. Sahadev Thapa	Dzongkhag Planning Officer, Wangdue
3	Mr. Dorji Wangdi	Dzongkhag Environment Officer, Wangdue
4	Mr. Sonam Zangpo	Dzongkhag Agriculture officer, Wangdue
5	Mr. D.S.Gomden	Senior, SA II, Wangdue
6	Mr. Tashi Norbu	PE, Wangdue
7	Mr. Ugyen	Dzongkhag Livestock Officer, Wangdue
8	Mr. Dorji	Senior Forest Ranger, Wangdue Territorial Division, DoFPs
9	Mr. Phunstho Namgay	Forest Officer, Wangdue Territorial Division, DoFPs
10	Mr. Karma Tenzin	Chief Forest Officer, Wangdue Territorial Division, DoFPs
11	Mr. Gyeltshen	Gup, Gangtey geog, GPEMC member
12	Mr. Singye Namgay	Livestock Extension Officer, GPEMC member
13	Mr. Pema Geyleg	Agri extension, Gangtey, GPEMC member
14	Ms. Phub Wangmo	GPEMC member
15	Mr. Yeshi Phuntsho	Forest Beat officer, GPEMC member
16	Mr. Leela Bahadur	Principal, Phobjikha Central school, GPEMC member
17	Mr. Yeshi Gyamtsho	Beta Primary school, GPEMC member
18	Mr. Jamtsho	Gup, Phobji geog, GPEMC member
19	Mr. Santa	RSPN center, GPEMC member
20	Mr. Forest	RSPN center volunteer
21	Mr. (Dasho) Kinzang Dorji	Dzongdha, Haa District Administration
22	Mr. Karchung	District Agriculture Officer, Haa
23	Mr. Pema Thinley	Offtg. Planning Officer, Haa
24	Mr. Loden Jimba	District Livestock Officer, Haa
25	Mr. Changlu	Livestock Production Officer, Haa Fish farm
26	Mr. Pema Tenzin	Youth local guide, paragliding gp, Haa
27	Mr. Pem Tshering	Youth Paragliding gp, Haa
28	Mr. Namgay Chencho	Youth local guide gp, Haa
29	Mr. Ugyen Wangdi	Youth Paragliding gp, Haa
30	Ms. Yeshi Choden	Youth local guide, souvenir gp, Haa
31	Mr. Sonam Wangdi	Youth local guide, souvenir gp, Haa
32	Ms. Namgay Choden	Youth souvenir gp, Haa

33	Mr. Sonam Dorji	Youth local guide/souvenir gp, Haa
34	Ms. Tshewang Lham	Homestay, Phobji Geog
35	Mr.Sathay	Homestay, Phobji Geog
36	Ms. Yanka Dema	Homestay, Phobji Geog
37	Ms. Daw Lham	Homestay, Phobji geog
38	Ms. Tshering Lham	Homestay, Phobji Geog
39	Ms. Pem	Homestay., Gangtey geog
40	Ms. Pasa	Homestay, Gangtey geog
41	Ms. Phub Lham	Homestay, Gangtey geog
42	Ms. Wangchuk Lham	Homestay, Gangtey geog
43	Manger and team	Wangchuk hotel, Gangtey
44	Ms. Sonam Zangmo	GM, Dewachen Hotel
45	Ms. Sonam	Host, Aman Kora, Gangtey
46	Mr. John Wright	GM, Gangtey Lodge, Gangtey
47	Mr. Yeshi Gyamtsho	GM, Gakiling Hotel, Gangtey
48	Mr. Kesang	GM, Phuntsocholing Farm house
49	Ms. Sangay	Asst. Manager, Thegchenphodrang, Gangtey
50	Mr. Kinley Wangchuk	Homestay, Dumcho, Haa
51	Ms. Damcho Pem	Homestay, Dumcho, Haa
52	Mr. Ugyen	Homestay, Dumcho, Haa
53	Ms. Pema Wangmo	Homestay, Haa
54	Ms. Chencho Lhamo	Haa Valley Cooperative, Haa
55	Mr. (Dasho) Kuenzang Dorji	Retired Army Officer, New Hotel, Dumcho
56	Mr. Rinchen Khandu	Rigsum resort, Haa
57	Mr. Pasang	Gup, Bjee Geog, Haa
58	Mr. Kencho	Gup, Katsho geog, Haa
59	Ms. Sonam	GAO, Katsho geog, Haa
60	Mr. Phuntsho Norbu	Mangmi, Katsho geog, Haa
61	Ms. Pem Dem	Homestay, Talung, Haa
62	Ms. Zimba Zangmo	Incharge, READ center, Yangthang, Haa
63	Ms. Sangay Dema	Homestay, Yangthang, Haa
64	Ms. Chimmi Zangmo	Homestay, Yangthang, Haa
65	Mr. Nima Tshering	Gup, Esu geog, Haa
66	Mr. (Dasho) Chencho Norbu	Secretary, NEC, Thimphu
67	Ms. Sonam Choden	Senior Forest Officer, WMD, DoFPs
68	Dr. Pema Wangdi	CFO, WMD, DoFPs
69	Mr. Phuntsho Gyeltshen	Sr. Research Officer, TCB
70	Ms. Chhimi Yuden	Tourism Officer, TCB
71	Ms. Sangey Lhaden	Tourism Officer, TCB

72	Mr. Dechen Dorji	CR, WWF, Thimphu
73	Mr. Sonam Dorje	ED, ABTO, Thimphu
74	Mr. Tek Bahadur	Program Officer, ABTO
75	Ms. Sangeeta	ED, HRAB, Thimphu
76	Ms. Lachi Maya Neopany	HRAB
77	Ms. Akane Matsuo	Project Officer, CBST, RSPN/JEEF
78	Ms. Kachi Wangmo	Project Officer, CBST, RSPN
79	Mr. Kinga Wangdi	Coordinator, CSLP, RSPN
80	Mr. Tshering Dendup	RSPN
81	Mr. Jigme Tshering	RSPN
82	Ms. Rinchen Wangmo	Program Manager, RSPN
83	Ms. Rebecca Pradhan	Sr. Ecologist, RSPN
84	Dr. Kinley Tenzin	Executive Director, RSPN
85	Mr. Tshering Phuntsho	UNDP (former RSPN)
86	Ms. Kezang Anayat	Agency for Promotion of Indigenous Craft (APIC)
87	Mr. Masahiro Shiomi	JICA office, Thimphu
88	Mr Garab Dorji	Chairman, GAB
89	Mr. Gyeltshen	Haa Dzongkhag
90	Mr. Koji Tagi	Director, International Program, JEEF
91	Ms. Tshewang Lhamo	NRED, DoFPS
92	Mr. Tshewang Lhendup	Asst. Research Officer, RSPN
93	Mr. Phurba Dorji	Project Officer, RSPN
94	Mr. Sangay Dorji	Project Manager, RSPN
95	Mr. Deepak Archarya	RSPN
96	Mr. Tashi Phuntsho	Coordinator, CMD, RSPN

Acknowledgement

It has been an enriching experience for me to undertake this research as it gave me the opportunity to understand the ground realities in promoting community based sustainable tourism development in Phobjikha valley and Haa. I would like to commend RSPN for taking this much needed initiative. I extend my gratitude to the management of RSPN for placing their confidence in me to conduct this study. In particular I would like to thank Tshering Chucki, Akane, Khachi, and Tshering for their support and guidance in not only arranging the field trips and meetings but for their active participation and sharing their insights. My appreciation to John Hummel for accompanying the field trips and giving his inputs. Jigme, Kinga, Forest (Volunteer) from RSPN, Koji (JEEF) and Tek (ABTO) for taking time to read the draft report and providing their valuable comments. Further I extend my appreciation to all the people consulted in the offices and field for their cooperation and support (listed under appendix II). Gratitude to JEEF and JICA for their financial and technical support to the CBST project. Namgay P Tshering for his time to proof read the report.

As the pursuit for socio-economic development continues the pressure and challenges in protecting the natural environment will keep escalating. The need for interventions and support from environmental organizations and public will become more critical. The commitment of RSPN in taking these initiatives will no doubt go a long way in paving the path for developing sustainable tourism destinations.

Karma Tshering, PhD
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ACRONYMS

ABTO	Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators
APIC	Agency for Promotion of Indigenous Crafts
CBST	Community Based Sustainable Tourism
CC	Carrying Capacity
DoFPs	Department of Forest and Park Services
DoL	Department of Livestock
GAB	Guide Association of Bhutan
HAB	Handicrafts Association of Bhutan
HRAB	Hotel and Restaurant Association of Bhutan
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JEEF	Japan Environmental Education Forum
LAC	Limits of Acceptable Change
MoAFS	Ministry of Agriculture & Forests
MoEA	Ministry of Economic Affairs
MoHCA	Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs
NEC	National Environmental Commission
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NRED	Nature Recreation and Eco-tourism Division
NRCRLF	National Research Centre for Riverine and Lake Fisheries
RSPN	Royal Society for the Protection of Nature
TCB	Tourism Council of Bhutan
WMD	Watershed Management Division
WWF	World Wildlife Fund



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