The Bhutan Foundation Strategy

History of the Bhutan Foundation

The Bhutan Foundation was founded in 1986 by Mr. John Goelet and Mrs Henrietta Goelet, with the assistance of Lyonpo Om Pradhan, who was the Bhutanese Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. They were then joined by the late Mr. Frank Hoch and the late Mrs. Lisina Hoch. Her Majesty the Royal Grand Mother, Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, became the Royal Patron of the Foundation. The Goelets and the Hochs were concerned about the overall development of Bhutan. They had strong relations with Bhutan and deeply understood the challenges faced by a country whose population lived in scattered communities across mountainous terrain with limited access to basic social services and largely dependent on agriculture. The main purpose was therefore to improve the livelihoods of the people of Bhutan. The concern was that agriculture was primarily based on poor farming methods and outdated technology.

The main objectives behind the initiative were:

- To assist the people in Bhutan to improve their living conditions through educational and self-help programs.
- To provide educational, medical and agricultural assistance, training and supplies to the people of Bhutan.
- To promote student and cultural exchanges between Bhutan and the United States.

On March 25, 1986 a certificate of incorporation was issued when the Bhutan Foundation formally registered in the State of Delaware. The first two Directors to serve on the Bhutan Foundation board were:

- Mr. Choda Tsering
- Mr. Robert S. Rich

Despite the good intentions to establish the Bhutan Foundation, constraints caused by communication, distance, and human resources greatly limited the ability of the Bhutan Foundation to expand and develop other opportunities.

In 2002, discussions took place at the Permanent Mission of Bhutan to the UN on a re-launch of the Bhutan Foundation. Finally, in 2006 Her Majesty Gyalum Tseyring Pem Wangchuck instructed Dr. Bruce Bunting, then Honorary Consul of Bhutan in the United States, to work with the Bhutan Mission to reactivate the Bhutan Foundation and constitute a new board with the approval of the existing board at that time. The new Board revised the mission statement, goals and objectives and developed a program strategy. Since then, the Bhutan Foundation has become an active organization with regular meetings of the board, offices in Thimphu, Bhutan and Washington, DC and around 40 partner organizations in Bhutan and over 20 international partners. This draft strategy was produced with full staff engagement, and presented to the Board in subsequent board meetings since 2018. As of October 2020, the Foundation has fourteen employees, five based in Washington, DC and nine in Thimphu, Bhutan.
The work of the Bhutan Foundation is driven by our carefully considered and focused Mission, but remains responsive to new ideas and initiatives that emerging situations in Bhutan demands, and/or as suggested by Donors and Partners.

Through its commitment to the shared values of Gross National Happiness, the Bhutan Foundation is fundamentally aligned with the vision of His Majesty the King, the Royal Government of Bhutan, and Bhutan’s emerging needs. The Foundation is not, and will not be, aligned with any political party. Its independence and objectivity are core values of the organization.

**Vision**

*We aspire for Bhutan to be a forward-looking society enriched by the core values of Gross National Happiness.*

**Mission**

*To support the people of Bhutan to reach their full potential by developing local capacity and facilitating global partnerships.*

**Who we serve**

*The people of Bhutan, whom we support through partnerships with local Civil Society Organizations, Communities, and various agencies of the Royal Government of Bhutan. We also serve our network of donors and friends of Bhutan globally who support our work in Bhutan.*

**Positioning**

Our broad network and deep connections provide opportunities for knowledge exchange and high-impact collaborations.

**Core values**

Collaborative, accountable, respectful, and efficient

**Personality**

Compassionate, inclusive, dedicated, and innovative

**Long-term strategic directions**

We work through partner organizations in Bhutan. We identify critical gaps, often overlooked by others, and strive to fill these gaps through strategic partnerships with local partners and international supporters. Our programs are aligned with the four pillars of Bhutan’s development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH): cultural preservation, environmental conservation, sustainable development and good governance.

In order to achieve our mission, the Bhutan Foundation is guided by the following strategic directions:

1. Preserve and promote Bhutan’s unique culture and traditions through **preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage**.
2. Protect Bhutan’s natural environment by supporting **conservation of biodiversity** and understanding **emerging environmental issues**.

3. Promote sustainable socio-economic development through **social enterprises** and by **strengthening public health** and **education services** in Bhutan.

4. Promote good governance by building capacity of **civil society organizations and local partners**, and supporting active youth citizenry.

The coronavirus pandemic of 2020 has highlighted food security, import substitution, employment generation, and revenue generation from exports as priority areas for Bhutan. The Foundation will integrate these issues in our programs wherever possible.

In addition, the Bhutan Foundation also promotes broader understanding of Bhutan in the United States and internationally by hosting and participating in events to build greater awareness of Bhutan.

**Three Core Competencies**

Across all our program areas, three key functions elucidate the core competencies of the Foundation:

1. We are quick to recognize Bhutan’s emerging needs and then bring the right expertise to Bhutan, through our relationship with external institutions and individuals, to help build Bhutanese professional capacity. From first starting work in Special Education, to building Emergency Medical Service capacity, initiating national discourses on energy efficiency, urban planning, and cultural restoration (to name a few), we have been bringing important issues to the fore and into the collective conscience of the larger Bhutanese community. We can successfully engage with our partners both at the local community level as well as at the national policy level.

2. We help CSOs in Bhutan by serving the role of a community foundation (maintaining donor relations, reporting, due diligence, financial transactions including offering tax receipts to US donors, and funding support). In addition, we also cater to the larger civil society community in Bhutan by helping strengthen their capacity in areas such as communications, financial management, and fundraising. This is a role much appreciated by our partners. Collectively, there is no other organization that plays these roles for Bhutanese CSOs.

3. We promote US-Bhutan relationships, both at a people-to-people level, and with the U.S. government. This role in soft diplomacy is further accentuated by the high caliber of our board and advisory council members, our donors, and the relationship and presence we maintain in the U.S. It is also our privilege to foster and maintain multi-generation relationship between the Bhutanese and old friends of Bhutan.