

CASE 3: BHUTAN

Waste paper recycling for youth employment



GRANTEE

Bhutan Youth Development Fund



COUNTRY

Bhutan



LOCATION

Bjemina, Thimphu, Bhutan



SGP CONTRIBUTION

US\$47,050



IN-CASH CO-FINANCING

US\$106,000



IN-KIND CO-FINANCING

US\$60,320



START DATE

August 2013



END DATE

March 2015

PROJECT CONTEXT

The Kingdom of Bhutan is experiencing a high rate of urban population growth and rural to urban internal migration. Waste and pollution are major environmental concerns in Bhutan, caused in part by rapid urbanization, inadequate infrastructure, low public awareness and education on waste management issues, and rapid economic development activities such as construction. Increased waste generation threatens human health and Bhutan’s pristine natural environment. Thimphu, the capital and largest city in Bhutan, produces some 50 tonnes of waste daily, which far exceeds the capacity of Thimphu’s waste management system.

The country also faces the challenge of providing employment opportunities to youth. In 2015, the unemployment rate among youth was at a record 10.7 percent, nearly four times the average unemployment rate. The Bhutan Youth Development Fund (BYDF) established the “Eco-Friendly Initiative” focusing on waste management and recycling efforts in 2013. An effort to employ recovering drug and substance users facing difficulty in finding jobs after having undergone rehabilitation, due to social discrimination or lack of marketable skills. BYDF came up with the Eco-Friendly Initiative as an innovative means to address the unemployment faced by this segment of the young population while also tackling waste and environmental challenges in Bhutan. BYDF initiated the project with support from SGP and co-financing from the Goodwill Community Foundation.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The Eco-Friendly Initiative promoted waste paper collection and management in Thimphu in collaboration with Greener Way, Thimphu’s main waste management firm. The project recycled waste paper to produce egg trays using specialized moulding machinery at the recycling facility. The egg trays were then packaged for sale and sold. The initiative promoted the sale of locally made egg trays as a means of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by reducing reliance on imported carbon intense trays transported from other countries. No chemicals were used in the production of egg trays while paper waste was re-used and reduced. The youth employed to work at the waste management and egg tray production facility were hired through the Nazhoen Pelri Drug Rehabilitation Centre creating a gainful employment opportunity for them upon completion of their treatment. The egg trays produced by the Eco-Friendly Initiative were purchased whole sale by a local retailer, Karma One Stop Shop which sold them directly to other shops and local farmers.



PHOTO: SGP BHUTAN



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BYDF engaged the local community by reaching out through its existing network of strategic partners to explore linkages and create collaborations that would maximize social impact. For instance, the partnership with Greener Way enabled BYDF to encourage the collection of waste paper at offices and other partner locations. The partnership with Nazhoen Pelri Drug Rehabilitation Centre created a direct link between work, economic benefit, and social integration for recovering drug users post rehabilitation.

RESULTS AND SCALING UP

The Eco-Friendly Initiative is Bhutan's first ever and currently only waste paper recycling facility. The Initiative promotes waste management efforts for a greener, cleaner environment and recycles waste paper collected in urban areas. In an hour, the facility produces approximately 720 egg trays from about 47kg of waste paper, thus producing 3,500 to 5,000 egg trays every day. The facility produces up to 1.3 million trays per year, recycling approximately 100 tonnes of waste paper and cardboard. The paper and cardboard which is taken out of the waste stream would, otherwise, polluted freshwater streams and rivers, dumped in a yard or burnt at the household level.

The Eco-Friendly Initiative trains and employs recovering young drug users to reintegrate them into society. Recovering youth benefit from the programme by being offered employment opportunities, and so far nine recovering youth who had undergone rehabilitation are employed. The facility has generated income to contribute towards sustaining the Drug Education and Rehabilitation Services program of the BYDF.

The project has shared its experience and lessons with the Rotary Club of Nepal and Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC), one of the largest NGOs based in Bangladesh. Both organizations have indicated that they are interested in efforts to scale up and replicate the initiative.

EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNT

The project gained lot of popularity through media coverage, particularly, through social media posts by SGP Bhutan. The project found that promotion of good practices was as important as other project components in creating awareness. The initial support received from SGP was crucial in providing the seed funding and for boosting confidence in the project. This, in turn, helped BYDF in the search for co-financing from other agencies. Support and cooperation from other partners and government support were also instrumental in the implementation of the project. For instance, the recycling facility was established on a space of 13,977 sq. feet of land leased by government for long term for a minimal fee (approximately US\$250 per year for thirty years). Additionally, the competency of the BYDF itself and the maturity of the organization contributed to the success of the initiative. One key innovation of the project was the synergy that it created by tackling multiple development objectives in an integrated way. Thus, environmental benefits were achieved through waste recycling, while social benefits were gained through employment and reintegration of recovering youth into society, and economic benefits were produced through the sale of locally made products which, in turn, generated income to sustain BYDF programmes.