



Progress Towards Environmental Sustainability

Bhutan has a rich natural endowment with an extremely abundant forest cover of 73% and with 26% of its territory established as protected areas to conserve its rich biodiversity. Additional areas constituting 9% of the total land area have also been designated as biological corridors that connect the protected areas.

Among the key challenges confronting the goal of ensuring environmental sustainability is the rapid population growth that Bhutan is experiencing. While the growth level has come down from 3.1%, the present growth rate of 2.5% still poses a serious threat to the country's environmental resources.

Bhutan's target is that by the end of the Ninth Five Year Plan in 2007, 100% of the population will enjoy access to safe drinking water. This will require the annual construction of 130 new schemes, in addition to rehabilitating and maintaining numerous old schemes. As the overall percentage of people without access to safe drinking water decreased from 55% in 1990 to 22% in 2000, the MDG target has already been achieved.

With increasing pressures on grazing land, agriculture, and forest resources, the protection of forest lands and conservation of biological diversity are expected to become ever more difficult. Bhutan's fuel wood consumption per capita is particularly high. Overgrazing by domestic livestock has further been identified as a serious environmental threat with great potential to impact forest regeneration and effect changes in natural vegetation. Recently, air and water pollution near industrialized and urban areas have been of concern.¹

QUICK FACTS

CURRENT PORTFOLIO BUDGET

Total UNDP-GEF and Co-Finance:	\$6,408,600
Total UNDP and Co-Finance:	\$247,140
Total MPU and Bilateral:	\$60,000
Total:	\$6,715,740

SPOTLIGHT

Working with Rural Communities to Conserve Wood Energy²

Bhutan has one of the highest per capita domestic fuelwood consumption in the world, particularly in rural areas. The people of the Trashigang district are among the most devout Buddhists in Bhutan, with religious institutions the largest consumers of fuelwood after rural households, due to the religious festivals and rites that provide food and beverages for monks, devotees and lay people. Trashigang is however one of the districts with the most severe fuelwood shortages, which is threatening the sustainability of the forests and the religious events. Fuelwood collection distances have also increased over the years, making this task one of the most arduous activities for rural women.

The GEF Small Grants Programme, together with the local community and UNDP, established a 1-year project in 1999 to reduce fuelwood consumption and the time spent on collection. The project installed shielded metal cooking stoves with hot water jackets, two each in ten religious institutions, at a cost of US\$ 33,069. The Bhutan Youth Development Agency (BYDA) was the main project proponent and actor, with the Trashigang District administration providing logistical support.

As a result of the project the community kitchens reported that fuelwood consumption dropped to at least a half, saving roughly 220-280 tonnes of fuelwood a year. The improved stoves also contributed to increased cleanliness of community kitchens, reducing cooking time and lowering smoke-related health risks to kitchen users.

By selecting religious institutions, the stoves were given great exposure and generated a widespread public response. The Trashigang District has consequently embarked on a project to install similar stoves in some 14 additional religious institutions with UNDP funding. BYDA's involvement of young people in implementing the activities helped ensure the project's success and created a precedent for the youth development-environmental conservation linkage.



UNDP is helping Bhutan at the national level through advocacy, policy advice and support for countrywide conservation strategies. This includes the preparation of assessments and plans to strengthen Bhutan's environmental management strategy.³ "Focus should be shifted to environmental conservation as an opportunity for, rather than a constraint to, development in Bhutan. Indeed, in many respects conservation is development for the country. Hydropower, which already contributes some 40% of the GDP, has almost unlimited potential in Bhutan and constitutes a national incentive to preserve forest cover, provided that local communities in affected areas also benefit."



Renata Lok Dessallien, Resident Representative

PORTFOLIO

FSSD* Bhutan's efforts to identify needs and priorities for capacity building with respect to the global environment taking into account the three Rio Conventions and associated thematic areas of biodiversity, climate change and desertification are being supported by UNDP to develop a combination of an environmental action plan, climate change adaptation programme, and national capacity self assessment. Due to the vulnerability of the country to natural hazards, UNDP is launching the Thimphu Valley Earthquake Risk Management project which will undertake a vulnerability study of Thimphu Valley and draft an action plan for an earthquake disaster scenario.

BIODIVERSITY Development and implementation of a management plan for Thrumshingla National Park is an essential undertaking to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity resources in Bhutan. Several initiatives are underway to help Bhutan address threats to indigenous livestock and crop genetic resources and to assess capacity building needs, identify specific priorities to promote national biodiversity, improve availability and sharing of information for policy makers and the public.

CHEMICALS With MLF funding, UNDP is assisting Bhutan to meet Montreal Protocol targets through the implementation of an investment project under the refrigerant management plan. The project aims to provide technical assistance to servicing establishments and end-users to retrofit existing CFC-based refrigeration equipment to alternatives. It also provides basic tools and training to servicing enterprises to promote better and more efficient refrigeration management practices.



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PARTNERS
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SDS
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¹Bhutan MDGR 2002 http://www.undp.org/documents/158-Bhutan_MDG_Report.pdf; ²Norbu, P.U and Giri, S., "Working with rural communities to conserve wood energy: A case study from Bhutan" in Energy for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific Region: Challenges and Lessons from UNDP Projects, New York: UNDP, 2004: <http://www.undp.org/energy/esdasiapac.htm> and SGP Online database: <http://sgp.undp.org/index.cfm?Module=Projects&Page=ShowProject&ProjectID=3287>; ³<http://www.undp.org.bt/environment.php>; ⁴Frameworks and Strategies for Sustainable Development