



IYV 2001 IN BHUTAN

**A Report of Bhutan's Involvement in
International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001**



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Bhutan and Volunteerism - an Introduction

Bhutan, landlocked between two of Asia's biggest giants, China (Tibet) to the north and India to the east, south and west is one of the most mountainous countries in the world. Throughout history Bhutan has remained isolated and relatively uninfluenced by the changes that were taking place in other parts of the world. In the early 1960s, Bhutan cautiously opened its doors to the forces of change and modernization.

Bhutan is a country of rolling hills and towering crags, with only small patches of cultivation and very little deforestation. Bhutan is often compared to Switzerland, not only because their sizes are similar but also because many parts of Bhutan looks like the Swiss Alps, with green hills, houses that look like chalets and snow peaks sticking out of nowhere.

Bhutan is not an ordinary place. It has one foot in the past and one in the future. Our farsighted leaders recognize the necessity of being part of the modern world, but they also realize that once the forests and culture are destroyed, they can never be recovered. Bhutan has maintained a very traditional culture, and yet adapted to the needs from modern technology. Thus a visitor will find monks transcribing ancient Buddhist texts into computers and traditionally dressed archers using the most modern high-tech bows and arrows.

Volunteerism is embedded in Bhutan's traditional belief systems and community practices. In particular, the principals of self-reliance, participation and community networks are revered as the key to community development and social cohesion. These principles are also found in Bhutan's path to development as reflected in the vision of Gross National Happiness. Alongside the traditional, the focus is also on emerging contemporary forms of community organization towards addressing a wide range of issues including urbanization, environmental conservation, community services, disadvantaged groups and cultural development. Several local volunteer groups exist in Bhutan (visit the ['Volunteers in Bhutan' home-page](#) for a list).

IYV National Steering Committee in Bhutan

In line with the designation of IYV, the formation of a Bhutan National Steering Committee took place in October of 2000 to bring about promotion and facilitation of volunteerism at the policy level. Alongside, a task force was mobilized to operationalize the IYV activities.

Membership across both committees was broad and comprise of concerned individuals from government, non-government, international organizations and the private sector with the key objective being:

- To recognize the efforts of volunteers in Bhutan and globally,
- To promote volunteerism in Bhutan and globally, and
- To facilitate the development of the voluntary sector through sustained institution building.

The scope of activities was broad - ranging from advocacy and awareness raising, to community network formation and development initiatives, to policy formulation and institutional strengthening.

Activities of IYV Bhutan

The IYV Bhutan Task Force with the guidance of the Steering Committee organized several activities to achieve the objectives. The activities carried out included:

- Nation-wide Essay Competition (winning essays were included in 'Volunteerism in Bhutan' publication - see below)
- Nation-wide Stamp Design Competition (winning designs were included in 'Commemorative IYV Stamp set' - see below)
- Official Launch of IYV in Bhutan (5th December 2000)
- Launch of IYV Publication (5th December 2000)
- Production of IYV television programmes on local volunteer groups (broadcast on national BBS TV throughout the year 2001)
- IYV commemorative Stamp Launch (July 2001)
- IYV Nationwide Debate competition for High Schools (August 2001)
- Formal Closing Ceremony for IYV Bhutan, and presentation of IYV certificates to volunteer organisations (5th December 2001).

The first initiative of the IYV Bhutan Team was the launch, on 5th December 2000 the opening day of IYV in Bhutan, of 'Volunteerism in Bhutan'; this publication was the first ever on the voluntary sector in Bhutan, and its aim was not only to highlight the value of active volunteerism, but also to stimulate discussion and debate and so further promote and facilitate volunteerism. Also included in the publication were the six best entries to the nation wide essay contest. The essay competition had been held nationwide. The topics for the essays were on volunteerism and three different topics were chosen for the three different categories. Entries to the competition came in from all over the country and over 200 youth and general public submitted their thoughts and experiences on volunteerism.

The launch of IYV in Bhutan was celebrated on the 5th December 2000 simultaneously to the launch globally. The launch was witnessed by officials from the government, non-government, International Organization and the private sector. Also present were volunteers from the Local and International organizations.

Immediately after, the IYV Team in cooperation with the Bhutan Post arranged yet another contest for the school children in Bhutan and this time it was the IYV stamp design contest. The contest was met with the same enthusiasm and entries to the contest came in from all over Bhutan. Bhutan's stamps have become very popular in the international philately market since the 1970's. The IYV commemorative stamp was launched in July 2001 at a small ceremony organized jointly with the Bhutan Post.

The IYV Nation-wide School Debate Competition was the next initiative of the IYV Bhutan Team. It was organized in August 2001 and eight of the High Schools in Bhutan sent in their teams. All the debates were on the theme of volunteerism, and the topics were very aggressively argued and the speakers were exceptionally good. The winning team, Yangchengphug High School from Thimphu, won by arguing in favour of the motion that *Volunteerism has existed for centuries without any 'International Years of Volunteers' (IYVs), so there is no need for an IYV now.*

Along with all these events, another team of IYV members was working alongside with the National Television in Bhutan, the Bhutan Broadcasting Service, to produce a series of television programs focusing on the voluntary sector in Bhutan. This series of television programs focuses on local and International volunteers active in Bhutan.

On 5th December 2001, IYV Bhutan celebrations came to a close with a formal closing ceremony presided over by Minister of Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Lyonpo Jigme Thinley. Certificates were awarded to volunteer organisations working in Bhutan (both local and international), and with the support of JOCV (the Japanese volunteer organisation) guests enjoyed a choice of Japanese or local delicacies after the ceremony.

One week later, Bhutan Broadcasting Service broadcast a radio overview of IYV and volunteerism in Bhutan, incorporating interviews from a range of volunteer organisations attending the closing ceremony.

And by the end of December, the final product of IYV - this web-site - was published on the internet. Although this may be the 'final product', it is planned that this site shall be regularly updated, and can become a key tool of supporting and promoting the values of volunteerism in Bhutan.

The Future of Volunteerism in Bhutan

Volunteerism is alive and well in Bhutan, both in the traditional sector, where it remains comparatively unaffected by modern influences, and in the relatively new and upcoming more formal volunteer sector. But much remains to be done. IYV in Bhutan has raised the people's awareness about the benefits of volunteerism, but we don't see 2001 as the 'end' - rather, it has been a launching pad for the future growth of volunteerism in this small Himalayan Kingdom.

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