

# LHOMON SOCIETY

Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative

A photograph of a middle-aged man with a warm smile, wearing a dark t-shirt, sitting behind a large, golden-brown pile of harvested rice. In the foreground, a woven basket filled with rice sits on the pile, with a long-handled sickle leaning against it. The background shows a clear blue sky and some dry grass.

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# **Lhomon Society: The Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative**

The Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative (SJI) is a community-based organization that operates under the auspices of the Lhomon Society; a registered Civil Society Organisation (CSO) in Bhutan. SJI promotes the principles of Gross National Happiness (GNH) in harmony with Government goals at grassroots level. SJI upholds trust and confidence, valuing and enhancing local potential through partnership with local government and government institutions.

## **Vision**

Foster genuine Gross National Happiness-based development and the knowledge, principles, values, and practices required to achieve it in Samdrup Jongkhar, as a model.

## **Mission**

To build prosperous, resilient, ecologically sensitive and self-reliant communities that have the courage, initiative, and wisdom to take their future in their own hands; to achieve food self-sufficiency; to enhance opportunities for local youth, and to create a genuine GNH-based educational system locally.

# **Five Program Areas**

## **I.Organic Agriculture**

SJI promotes organic farming through the preservation of indigenous agricultural practices and its enhancement through training, awareness and providing a technical backstop to the local communities.

## **II.Zero Waste**

As we aim for a zero-waste society, SJI works towards bringing behavioral change at household levels by educating people on sustainable production, consumption, and waste management.

## **III.Menchari GNH Model Village**

Menchari, a remote and underserved village in Orong Gewog (Block Administration), Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag (District) has been identified as a GNH Village.

We work to build genuine GNH villages by implementing the holistic and sustainable practices that constitute the core of SJI in two initial projects: the currently isolated and destitute community of Menchari, Samdrup Jongkhar district, and a new SJI|GNH Village to accommodate SJI's central office, current and projected activities.

## **IV.Lhomon Education**

We work for an authentic GNH-based education by developing exploratory thematic units at Chokyi Gyatso Institute, some of which are mindfulness and value-based education that can be replicated nationwide. We work for an education that empowers and revers contemporary knowledge and traditional wisdom by embedding self-reflexive education components in our initiatives.

## **V.Youth Engagement**

We actively work to provide training and local opportunities for youth by introducing and supporting initiatives that enhance self-confidence and entrepreneurship, thus empowering new generations to find purpose and dignity in labor. SJI empowers young people -- mostly out-of-school youths -- in remoter villages to find directions and purpose in their lives by providing training and opportunities to facilitate their growth and entrepreneurship.



# Organic Agriculture



The SJI has been involving out-of-school youths in farming to facilitate sustainable organic agricultural practices to enhance food self-sufficiency, boost cash income and build resilient farming communities.

At large to enhance food security in a heavily import driven economy through the promotion of sustainable farming practices towards food self-sufficiency.

As a first step towards the promotion of organic farming, first-ever seed bank was instituted in Samdrup Jongkhar to promote the use of native crop breeds through our partnership with the lead farmers in various parts of Samdrup Jongkhar. The SJI is also making an effort to encourage a similar approach towards livestock by promoting local breeds.

Under the Organic Agriculture Programme, the SJI has initiated composting, promotion of bio-pest management, and integrated farming. The development of products based on traditional farming knowledge and diversification of secondary goods from farm produce remains our priority in the agriculture programme. Sustainable Land Management is Pheluma village under Orong Gewog, Samdrup Jongkhar has also helped mitigate risks of land degradation like soil erosion and landslides for 68 households covering 50 acres of land. Our assessment also showed that the rice self-sufficiency in Pheluma increased by 37 percent after the introduction of upland rice.

**24 Households Now Grow Upland Rice**

**7.85 Acres Land Now Cultivates for Upland Rice**

**5.32 Metric Tons of Rice Harvested**



## SRI Boosts Rice Yield in Rikhey

Rice yield increased by a record 60 percent for farmers in Rikhey village in Dewathang Gewog (block), Samdrup Jongkhar after the introduction of System Rice Intensification (SRI) in 2016.

And farmers are saving on saplings since this method optimizes the use of younger and fewer saplings during the plantation. They also need less water since the technique follows an alternate wetting against the conventional method of continuous irrigation.

“I saved more than 88 percent of the saplings through SRI,” said a farmer from Rikhey Sangay Dorji who has adopted the SRI method, adding that he only used up 4 kilograms of the saplings in SRI against 24 kilogrammes in conventional rice cultivation.

Rekhey is a village of 64 households. The villagers’ livelihood hinges on farming. However, only 31 acres of their total 76 acres of the wetland has been under cultivation because of insufficient irrigation water.

The International Rice Research Institute, Philippines, defines SRI as an evolving set of practices aimed at increasing the productivity of irrigated rice by changing the management of plants, soil, water, and nutrients. But SRI is still new to the Bhutanese farmers. Only a handful have been introduced to the practice including the farmers in Rikhey, Phunthothang, and Pemathang since the SJI introduced the method in 2014. An Indian environment and a consultant Dr Julian Gonsalves who was visiting Samdrup Jongkhar then recommended the SRI as an alternative to conventional rice cultivation.





***Grain yield comparison between farmer's traditional rice cultivation and SRI at SJI sites.***

Year	Location	Grain Yield Kg/Acre		
		Traditional Farmers Practice	SRI	Yield Increase in Percent
2015	Pemathang	1219.50	1850.00	52
2015	Phuntshothang	1080.00	1282.50	19
2016	Rekhay/Dewathang	910.58	2023.58	122
2017	Rekhay/Dewathang	2023.5	3237.60	60

***Data Source: Crop cut by SJI***

Currently, 13 farmers are practicing SRI at Rekhay with funding from the Bhutan Foundation. The SJI plans to turn Rikhay as the first village in Bhutan to produce organic rice using SRI. Furthermore, plans to extend SRI are also being introduced in Toktokha village in Chukha and Phajo Goenpa in Lauri, Samdrup Jongkhar under the support of the Austrian Coordination Office and Helvetas, Bhutan.

Plans are underway to adopt the SRI method on upland rice and native variety like Khamti. Under the support of the Agriculture and Research Development Centre-Wengkhar, SRI has been incorporated in lead farmers' training. The SJI is also collaborating with the Jigme Namgyel Engineering College at Dewathang to develop farming tools through a participatory dialogue with the farmers.

**60% Increase in Yield**

**75% Seed Saved**

**13 Farmers Practice SRI**

# Story of a Lead Farmer in Samdrup Jongkhar

Meet the SJI's most active lead farmer Tshering Gyalpo, 33, from Dewathang Gewog (block) in Samdrup Jongkhar at the forefront of sustainable and organic agricultural practices.

Tshering Gyalpo is one of the eight Potential Lead Farmers the SJI trained in 2016 with the Agriculture and Research Development Centre (ARDC), Wengkhar, Mongar. Since he has come a long way to become a trainer himself and inspire other farmers in Samdrup Jongkhar to adopt practices of organic farming. As of now, he has trained more than 50 farmers in organic farming practices.

Between 2017-2018 Tshering Gyalpo trained eight more Potential Lead Farmers from Orong, Gomdar, Phuntshothang, Lauri and Dewathang Gewogs (blocks). Tshering Gyalpo also conducted a three-day training on organic farming after the youth farmers of Dongdongma village in Nanglam Gewog (block), Samdrup Jongkhar invited him.

Besides training more than 50 farmers in organic farming including, school teachers under his initiative, Tshering Gyalpo has taken up horticulture, cereal crops, vegetables, compost making, and land management.

But his interest extends beyond organic farming and training other farmers. Since he shares a genuine concern on the environment, Tshering Gyalpo has undertaken plantations of bamboo and trees to prevent land degradation. His close relationship with the community has also helped improve communal cohesion.

## 100 Over Farmers Trained

## 8 Villages Participated

## 5 Gewogs Covered





# Product Development Training



Product Development Training the SJI provided has enabled 15 farmers from Samdrup Jongkhar to do brisk food business from maize, tapioca, and quinoa. The SJI with support from the National Post Harvest Centre (NPHC) and ARDC, Wengkhar, Mongar trained the farmers on processing food items from maize, tapioca, and quinoa, which are grown in abundance in the villages. The participants also received equipment like fryers as part of the support to encourage their food processing business and product development.

**15 Women Trained**

**9 Food Products Developed**

**2 Gewogs Covered**



# Income From Organic Compost

Compost/manure from the biogas slurry has become the new source of cash income for the farmers of Dewathang for the first time ever.

After the SJI trained and supported one of the Lead Farmers, Tshering Gyalpo from Bangtsho on the production of compost from the biogas slurry, five more farmers were inspired to venture into the business. A few years ago the farmers never even thought that someone could earn by selling compost.

But today Tshering Gyalpo's compost sells at Nu 10 per kilogramme in the local market. And it fetches him a monthly income of Nu 5,000. The SJI initiated the biogas compost since no one in Samdrup Jongkhar was capitalising on the biogas slurry. The SJI trained Tshering Gyalpo and supported him with the materials to construct the compost shed.





# Preserving Traditional Cereal Crops

Seeds have been a part of Bhutan's cultural heritage for generations. For a country where about 69 percent of the population still lives in rural and semi-rural areas, seeds are an integral part of many rituals, ceremonies, and festivals celebrating the cycle of birth, life, and death.

Thus, the tradition of seed storage and preservation has been invaluable for Bhutanese farming, which remained the way of life for its people as an agrarian. However, the import of new and high-yield over time has also pushed some of the local seeds to the brink of extinction.

During our interactions with the farmers of Orong, Gomdar, and Dewathang Gewogs (block), many felt the urgency to revive, preserve and promote the local seeds to ensure its longterm sustainability. To this end, SJI has formed SKGG covering eight villages of Samdrup Jongkhar.

## 67 Varieties of Local Cereal Seeds Preserved

## 29 Farmers Engaged in Seed Preservation

## 1 Seed Bank Opened



# Building Menchari as a GNH Model Village



Menchari is one of the remotest and unreached villages in Orong Gewog (block), Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag (District Administration) where the community still lives poor dietary, hygiene, and sanitation.

Alcoholism is a serious issue in Menchari. And a considerable amount of what the villagers earn working in the construction works are wasted in alcoholism. Which is why many have ended up still living under the thatched bamboo huts. Young people are forced out of the village to urban centres in search of jobs leaving their frail old parents to tend to farms.

Recognising the urgency to support the village, the SJI shouldered the reins to build Menchari into a Gross National Happiness village while marking the 60th Birth Anniversary of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. The idea of a GNH village was to celebrate His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's visionary leadership, wisdom and unique guiding development philosophy, the Gross National Happiness. The commemoration dream project was launched on 15 December 2016.

**Alcoholism Reduced by 60 %**

**Improved Health & Sanitation**

**Improved Income**

**Became More Self-sufficient**

**Reduced Dependency on Off-farm Work**

**Gained Financial Literacy**



# Pottery and Bamboo Cups



Just a few years ago, pottery was dying as a trade. While its use for cooking was almost non-existent, it was reduced to a mere showpiece or souvenirs for tourists.

But the locally made earthen pots are making it back to the Bhutanese kitchens.

Thanks to youth and women in Samdrup Jongkhar for taking up the pottery that has now become a brisk business for the people here. Many Bhutanese are now taking interest in earthen pots, preferred to cook traditional cuisine curry like ema datshi and heat local brew, ara.

Thus, the Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative (SJI) started the pottery in Samdrup Jongkhar to support the women and youth in the villages to help make some cash income. They're also encouraged to use it in their own homes.

The return of earthen pots has also enabled the promotion and preservation of ancient pottery. Meanwhile, the use of bamboo cups (cups made from bamboo) has reduced the use of plastic cups with the government recently announcing to promote local produce in its meetings.

The SJI initiated the project of making cups from bamboo, which is grown abundantly in Samdrup Jongkhar. Further, a basic manual on traditional pottery has also been published to preserve the art for future generations.

# Solar Fencing Saves Time for Menchari People

People of Menchari village in Orong Gewog (block), Samdrup Jongkhar no longer have to spend time guarding their fields against the wild animals.

Thanks to the installation of solar fencing in their village. Across Bhutan, farmers share stories of farmers having to spend sleepless nights from the day of sowing seeds to until the harvest of crops. Guarding also takes away a lot of their precious time. And farmers of Menchari are no exception.

But the arrival of solar fencing in their village has spared farmers from the hassles of guarding their crops against the wild animals. Today, with solar fencing keeping the wild animals at bay, many farmers are now able to channel their time doing other important farm activities like tending to their cattle or doing household errands.

## 21 Households Benefited

## 5 Kilometres of Farmland Protected





# Youth Engagement



## Community Mapping

To strengthen democratic participation through empowering youth and citizens as agents of change to model an inclusive approach to civic engagement, SJI in collaboration with Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) trained 30 youths from Samdrup Jongkhar community on Community Mapping skills.

The training enabled 30 participants in developing three Local Action Plans (LAPs) for their respective communities using the community mapping tools. Three youth groups from Dewathang, Menchari and Samdrup Jongkhar have completed the following projects in their respective areas of residence:

1. Maintenance of farm road in Menchari, Orong Gewog
2. Construction of marketing shed for local produce in Rekhay under Dewathang Gewog
3. Development of water pond from spring water at Samdrup Jongkhar Thromde.

The SJI provided Nu 20,000 to each group with support from the BCMD to implement the Local Action Plans with the help of their community members and other relevant stakeholders.

## 91 Households Benefited

## 30 Youths Participated

## 3 Projects Implemented



# Zero Waste



## Dealing With Waste Creatively

Although Bhutan aspires to remain carbon neutral, the existing consumer pattern and the waste generated from mindless consumption is alarming against the proportion of its small population.

Thus, The Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative's Zero Waste Program has been striving to reduce waste at source through the change in consumption patterns. The initiative encourages people to change their consumption habits by adopting more sustainable production and the use of eco-friendly resources.

SJI's Zero Waste Program defines zero waste as the introduction and adoption of systems and habits that make sustainable use of local resources. This objective is pursued through Zero Waste projects wherein communities are sensitized to decrease the consumption of materials that have adverse effects on the environment, health, and sanitation.

At the same time, they are encouraged to adopt a healthier lifestyle by consuming more local produce to promote and sustain local farming practices. The same practice also ensures the conservation of local knowledge while improving community cohesion.

To achieve this objective, SJI will collaborate with Wamrong, Samdrupcholing and Jomotsangkha Dungkhangs to work with its target groups like schools, institutions, and communities in these areas. These areas will serve as testing grounds to establish model villages to replicate and scale-up Zero Waste activities throughout the dzongkhag. Such effort is expected to turn Samdrup Jongkhar into an example for other Dzongkhags. Similar projects could be initiated in other dzongkhags, too.



# Waste to Weaving Blueprint

Entering its 6th year, The Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative's Zero Waste Project aims to reduce waste in Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag through practical and awareness-based approaches.

Recognizing that waste reduction must be economically viable to ensure its sustainability, the Waste to Weaving project was started to both promote income-generating forms of waste management and provide awareness around waste-related issues.

The Waste to Weaving project also fulfills a number of SJI's other overarching goals like curbing rural-urban migration in Bhutan. Rural-urban migration is a growing concern since more people leaving their farmlands is making Bhutan more dependent on import.

Our Waste to Weaving experience has shown that incorporating recycled materials into traditional weaving rekindles interest in weaving among young women. The project has also enabled in preservation and promotion of traditional handloom weaving while offering new business opportunities to rural youth.

## 6 Waste Craft Training Held

## 150 People Trained

## 3 Dzongkhags Covered



# Lhomon Education

The Lhomon Education (LME) continued its efforts to help teachers create creative and innovative GNH-based curricula for learning and education.

More than 50 teachers from schools and colleges were trained on mindfulness. A Sunday Reading Program was initiated to engage the youth from nearby areas meaningfully.

The curriculum for a five-year study was reviewed and finalized. The Chokyi Gyatso Institute (CGI) and LME organized a three-day Transformative Pedagogy and Communication skills training to impart the modern teaching skills to Khenchen, lamas, lopons, and teachers of the Institute. Media Literacy Unit was developed to educate students and teachers on media and equip them with critical knowledge to judge information and news in the age of social media.





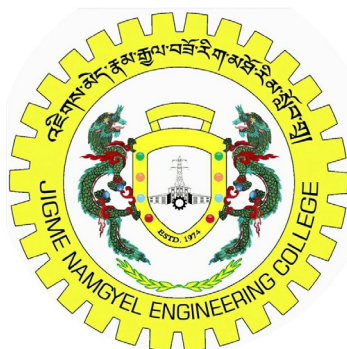
## **Financial Statement as of 31 December 2018**

# Funders





# Partners



# Acknowledgement

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1. Dasho Ugen Chewang (Vice Chairperson), Thimphu
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