In this issue the exchange participants from Bhutan, Mr. Karma Wangchuk and Mr. Passang Tobgay share their ten months experiences in their host countries. They were sent to India and Nepal as exchange participants under the FK exchange program.

Substance of the project for Tarayana Foundation (Bhutan) and Technology and Action for Rural Advancement (TARA), India, People, Energy and Environment Development Association (PEEDA), Nepal, and Practical Action, Bangladesh, Project Titled Promotion of Appropriate Green Technologies to bring about Rural Prosperity is an exchange program under FK Project.

The main substance of the partnership is to foster utilization of appropriate green technologies in order to create more jobs, reduce drudgery, improve living conditions and create sufficient time for gainful engagement. It also enables staff members from the two host organizations to share their experience in teaching green technology skills to members of rural communities. It is hoped that this will encourage the adaptation and adoption of relevant green technologies to improve livelihood options in rural communities within partner countries.

Ms. Sonam Pema from Loselling Middle Secondary School shares her excited experience travelling in India for the first time in her life. Sonam was selected as one of the participants for the Asian Youth Festival Consciousness of Oneness held from 21st-27th of January 2012 in Kolkata, India. The Asian Youth Festival is an event organized by the Young Men’s Welfare Society, Kolkata, whereby they invite a few hundred young people in the age group 15 – 18, drawn from the least privileged sectors of society from 18 states in India and 5 overseas countries to promote the empowerment of youth and re-affirm their cultural heritage, interconnectedness and hope for the future.

“Happiness is ... 

.........positive thinking towards wellbeing of disadvantaged people”

Karma Wangchuk
Program Officer (FK Exchange Participant)
I feel lucky that I got a chance to be part of this program; it helped me enormously to broaden my knowledge in the sector of renewable energy and its technology, especially in the areas of Pico and Micro hydroelectric power.

Regarding my ten-month stay in Nepal: firstly, it was an experience of living and organizing myself in a new socio-cultural environment. The essence of exchange is going to another country where no one knows anything about you and this is something that can be truly frightening, since you have left everyone you know behind and entered into a completely unknown place, but this experience is also truly liberating. The exchange program was very useful to me professionally as it provided an intensive focus on livelihood, home stays, language skills, community service, cultural activities and technology transfer. Beside this, the main objective of the exchange program was to increase our understanding and knowledge of how we might foster rural prosperity through promotion of green technology.

For me, learning Pico and Micro hydro-technology was a very challenging task. I was involved in a detail feasibility study (DFS), site verification, power output testing, power output verification and designing T&D line. But after getting oriented with technical things, I learned how to cope with cross-cultural challenges too and enjoyed every minute in my life, discovering that it was fun and a good way to learn about a new technology as well as culture. During many field visits, I learned about the uses of Micro hydro as well as other technologies. I think that now I am much better at adapting to a new environment and learned many life lessons that will help me in the future.

I had a great time visiting many rural parts of Nepal, where I shared what I knew with Village Development Committee members (VDC) and vice-versa. It was very interesting to know that most of the cities have 14 to 16 hours of load shedding (or rolling blackouts) but most of the rural villagers have no load sheding and don’t even know the meaning of the word. Most of the rural areas were electrified by community-owned Pico and Micro hydro power plants and all the people were happy. Their standard of living had increased to the point that they were able to watch the evening news on their color television, access the Internet, and use electric machines such as huller grinding machines and saw mills. Previously, income-producing work had been limited primarily to agriculture. Now, with access to 24-hour power, villagers are able to save both money and time. Their lives have changed; many village women use the evening hours in productive way such as making handicrafts. Students have the opportunity to read and study at night. Other benefits of hydropower include use of improved cook stoves and better sanitation facilities. Nepal has been changing at a very rapid pace. Villagers no longer need to cut down trees to burn for cooking or lighting. Instead they are using electric-powered cooking appliances and energy-efficient CFL bulbs for lighting.

I found the exchange program to be very memorable. This trip has left me with fond memories of both Nepal and the friends I made there. This opportunity has allowed me to interact with many people and with many different communities. I look forward to applying my new expertise in rural renewable energy technologies to the needs of members of rural communities in Bhutan.

Passang Tobgay
My Experience During FK Exchange Program

I, Karma Wangchuk from Tarayana Foundation, was chosen as an FK exchange participant. TARA (Technology and Action for Rural Advancement) India was my host organization and country. Technology on Stabilized Compressed Earth Block (SCEB) and Waste Paper Re-cycling were the tasks assigned to me during the ten months I spent in my host country.

I started my work with the Waste Paper Re-cycling unit in Development Alternatives bearing extreme heat of 48 to 50 degrees celsius during the summer months. I felt excitement to be in a new working environment, but also depression and heat exhaustion, due to the unbearably high temperatures and the experience of being alone in a new culture. “No problem, it will come down next month,” my host Administrative Officer Mr. Promodh Shani, advised me, which helped to reassure me. The deeper I go with my work and research, the more the challenges seem to increase. “Most people miss opportunities because opportunity comes only once but it comes accompanied by thousands of challenges” was my motto which guided me to achieve my goals.

I can proudly say that my period of training at the Paper unit proved very useful to me, I was able to coordinate a Handmade Paper Products Training jointly with TLA (TARA Livelihood Academy) to SHG women which was funded by NABARD.

Two weeks of training on Stabilized Compressed Earth Block (SCEB) and its production at Auroville Earth Institute was one of my most memorable experiences. SCEB production and its application was the main course that was taught during two weeks of training. Building a compressed earth block house with SCEB at TARA Pahuj was my main achievement after going through the training.

India welcomes the summer by playing with different colors and celebrating a Hindu festival known as HOLI that turned out to be my farewell from my host country and organization. Now it’s time to carry on my work with my home organization (Tarayana Foundation), teaching others how to build houses with low cost, eco-friendly building materials, with the goal of enhancing the Gross National Happiness of those in need.

Karma Wangchuk
The Tarayana Annual Retreat

The Tarayana annual retreat/workshop was held on 17th and 18th of January 2012 in the Tarayana conference hall.

Tarayana engaged FOCUS Adventure India Pvt Ltd to provide the two-day workshop on team building, leadership and interpersonal communication skills.

The choice of theme for this workshop took into consideration Tarayana’s recent recruitment of new staff. The workshop helped new staff members to understand Tarayana’s values, and prepared them to dedicate themselves to the service of the less fortunate. Field staff appreciated the focus on Leadership skills, which are required in their work with remote and disadvantaged communities.

The workshop encouraged us to reflect on our strengths and weaknesses, both as individuals and as a team. We found that we could best achieve common goals if we all worked together, sharing skills and learning from others. The retreat also gave Tarayana staff members the opportunity to get to know their colleagues in a supportive environment.

Training on Pit Cultivation

On 15-17 February 2012, Mr. Pichai Samrongsang, FK participants (BAOWE). Mr. Mamun, and Fk Participants (Tarayana) accompanied by Ms. Pema and Ms. Ugyen from Tarayana went to Dechenpelri, Gelephu to provide hands-on training in pit culture to the villagers. Twenty-one farmers attended the discussion on problem analysis of framing in Dechenpelri. A team demonstrated two improved farming methods, Pit cultivation and Bed cultivation, which have the potential to improve soil fertility and farming productivity in the village. Mr. Pichai provided hands-on training on how to prepare the IMO (Indigenous Micro Organism) to improve soil fertility.

Tarayana & Helvetas Make Joint Visit to Kengkhar Geog

The HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation has renewed their support of Tarayana by agreeing to support Tarayana’s Phase III for Rural Livelihood for duration of three years. To kick off the project, a team comprised of Sonam Pem, Program Director; Tarayana’s Tashi Pem; Dy. Resident Coordinator and Liliane Tarnutzer, Helvetas Junior Program Officer made a joint visit to selected sites in Kengkar Geog, Mongar from 12th-27th of February. The purpose of the visit was to meet with community members to discuss the issues and challenges they face as well as to identify and prioritize their needs. The trip enabled the team to assess the assets and limitations of the villages and to identify potential activities in each village to enhance the villagers’ livelihoods, based on available resources and skills.
Eco-Stoves

Tarayana is currently implementing an Eco-stoves project in Goshi and Deorali Geog in Dagana funded by ALSTOM Foundation, Austria. In total, 300 eco-stoves have been distributed in 5 communities in Goshi and 4 communities in Deorali Geog. The purpose of this project is to achieve the following goals:

1. To reduce the need for wood fuel collection
2. To reduce the incidence of respiratory and eye problems due to daily exposure to smoky conditions
3. To reduce the carbon footprint of each household as their dependence on wood fuel decreases
4. To reduce deforestation
5. To free women and children to pursue more productive activities (with the reduction of time spent collecting wood fuel)

On 9th March, 2012, a joint monitoring exercise was undertaken by ALSTOM Foundation and Tarayana Foundation in the targeted communities of Goshi Geog. The feedback from the households using the eco-stoves was very positive. Chimneys eliminated harmful exposure to smoke. Less firewood was required to cook their meals. Community members also noted that less time was required to cook food on these stoves than on their traditional clay stoves or electric cookers.

There is now a demand from other households for eco-stoves and Tarayana would like to scale up this activity and provide eco-stoves to other remote communities that traditionally rely on firewood for cooking.

In Brief

Signing of Project Agreement Between Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation and Tarayana

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation and Tarayana signed the third phase of HELVETAS support to Tarayana on 27th of March 2012. This phase of support will create synergies between Tarayana & other CSOs in rural areas; increase CSO support on awareness-raising events at the local level; increase engagement of CSOs in issue-based advocacy; improve skills for income generation; increase household income through viable income-generating opportunities and enhance Tarayana’s institutional capacity. HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation has been supporting Tarayana’s work for the past nine years.

Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls with Disabilities

Tarayana participated in the Panel Discussion on Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls with Disabilities: Their Role in Poverty and Hunger Eradication, Development and Current Challenges on 28th February 2012, coinciding with the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Mrs. Dhuptho Zangmo participated as Women’s representative along with some students with disabilities from Draktscho in the first ever video conference with the United Nations and organizations working in Bhutan and internationally to improve the welfare of Persons with Disabilities (PWD).
The Folk Food Festival was held on 29th February, 2012 at the beautiful premises of the Folk Heritage Museum. This is one area in Thimphu that has been thoughtfully and lovingly designed to serve as a link between Bhutan’s past, present and future. Members of the younger generation and foreign visitors go there to get a glimpse of our traditional way of life, as it was lived a century ago in Thimphu and still exists in our rural communities.

Her Majesty, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, Royal Patron of the Folk Heritage Museum inaugurated the exhibition and the restaurant. Her Royal Highness, Ashi Sonam Dechan Wangchuck, Lyonpos, members of the international community and the diplomatic corp., senior Government Officials, tour operators and other distinguished invitees attended the food festival.

The exhibition titled ‘Folk Foods of Bhutan’ was put together in a “public-private” partnership initiative, to celebrate and display the cuisine of the various regions of Bhutan. It also served to dispel the myth that Bhutanese food begins and ends with our famous “ema datse”.

The Folk Food Festival showcased the wide array of ways in which our indigenous rural communities prepare and consume many edible plants, fruits, roots, seeds and tubers. There is a wealth of knowledge that has been accumulated over centuries through the intimate interdependence of these communities with their natural environment.

With its inauguration, the Folk Heritage Restaurant hopes to encourage a revival of some of the old forgotten Folk Foods of Bhutan. The restaurant will also endeavour to preserve our rich culinary heritage and help to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy the delightful variety of our traditional cuisine.

The ingredients that will be used in this restaurant will come in from village self-help groups around the country, providing additional income for these small communities while giving visitors authentic folk food experiences. Some herbs and greens will be grown on the Folk Heritage Museum premises, where restaurant patrons will be able to enjoy their aromatic scents.

The restaurant is being run by the expert team at Chuniding Resorts. The restaurant looks forward to patronage from Government offices, International Organizations, Tour companies and individuals.

The Folk Heritage Museum staff and the Museum Restaurant staff will work together to ensure that all visitors will have a stimulating experience, engaging all the senses including sight, sound, smell, touch and taste to create a rich culinary experience.

The Folk Food Festival concluded with a delicious and diverse lunch, served by the Folk Heritage Restaurant to all the festival participants.
Someone has rightly said “There is a first time for everything”, and for me the trip to Kolkata was a “first time” for a lot of things. When the news arrived that a member of the Tarayana club from our school would have the privilege of visiting the City of Joy, I was beyond myself with excitement. I prayed to be selected and my wish was granted. Finally the much awaited day came and we assembled at the Post Office to board the bus that would take us to Phuntsholing. There were 17 of us, 7 girls, 8 boys and two teacher coordinators. For many of us, it was the very first time we were leaving Bhutan. The group sang all the way to Phuntsholing.

In Phuntsholing we boarded another bus to take us to Kolkata. I could hardly wait. We left behind the beautiful serene mountains and disappeared into the hustle of India. The journey was hard but I hardly took notice. I was engulfed in the new settings as we drove through tea estates, towns and villages. The night scene was like a dream. Tiny fireflies broke the darkness, lighting the night sky. I was amazed for I had never before seen so many fireflies. They gave us a feeling of “happy melancholy” that slowly rocked our group to slumber.

The night on the bus was treacherous and uncomfortable. We woke up to the sound of the driver yelling: “Breakfast! Be back on the bus in 15 minutes, everyone.” I was sore from the bumpy bus ride. Our necks ached and our legs were swollen. But we always kept our destination in our hearts and minds, so we were back to being the happy, lively group representing Bhutan. After a hearty Indian breakfast of mouthwatering Dosa and chai, the ride resumed.

Nearing our destination, we began to see bigger buildings and heavier traffic. At last we were in Kolkata. Everyone on the bus was wide awake and taking in the new environment. The roads were packed with yellow taxis and the buildings and walls were adorned with advertisements. Roadside vendors sold all sorts of food and trinkets. There were goodies and people everywhere. I was mesmerized. The bus took us to the station and we disembarked in a daze.

At the station, the teacher in charge of transportation greeted us. We had to take yet another bus ride to the school that we would be calling home for the next week. The school was very far from the city and the ride was especially hard because we had been riding for a day and half on a really bad road. By the time we arrived at the Children’s Foundation School, our energy was drained. I felt like a zombie. I could hardly stand and carry my luggage. My legs felt like jelly and my head felt like I was on Mt. Everest.

We noticed that some groups had already arrived and were settled in. We were taken to our rooms which we would be sharing with the Tibetan group from Himachal Pradesh. The Tibetans were very friendly and helped us settle in. By lunch time we were all good friends.

The first night all the groups were introduced to each other along with the coordinators. We met children from 18 states in India and four countries including Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. Since we were introduced as from Bhutan, everyone called us “Bhutan”. I had never been happier. I felt so proud talking about our culture and way of life. Hearing about the circumstances of some people in India, I felt lucky to be Bhutanese.

During the days we were taken sightseeing to some of the most popular places in Kolkata. We went to the National Museum, Nature park, the Science city, the Heritage School, Mother House, Nicco park and shopping in the streets. Of all these places, the one that stays with me is Mother House. I had heard of Mother Teresa and seen her pictures too, but that was all she was—a picture and a tale. The visit to her house made her real. I was a part of History. I was in her house looking at her things and seeing her sisters continue her work after her departure. For me it was History come to life.

Every night for the next four days, different groups presented their traditional folk songs and dances. We too performed our traditional dance. The other participants were in awe. They said that our kiras and Ghos were beautiful, and that our dance was so graceful. I never felt so proud to be a Bhutanese. Up until that day, I never knew how unique our tradition was. Everyone wanted to take photos with us in our Kiras and Ghos. I felt like a celebrity. They wanted to wear our national dress and speak our language. Teaching them was so much fun. It taught me the significance of our tradition and culture.
Upcoming Events
April, May & June 2012

April 2nd-6th : Study tour on Gravity Rope Way in Nepal
April 15th-23rd : Surgical Camp 2012
April 23rd-24th : Debriefing of FK Exchange Participants in Bangkok
April 23rd-4th May : Prep Course for the next Participants of Promotion of Appropriate Green Technologies to bring about Rural Prosperity
May 4th-6th : Tarayana Annual Fair
June : Project Evaluation and Reporting

Support Tarayana
We invite you to be a part of reaching out to the most vulnerable members of our society through your support to Tarayana. We operate with financial support of individuals and organizations, without which we would not have the opportunity of helping so many families help themselves. Tarayana complements and supplements the initiatives of the Government in empowering rural communities towards sustainable livelihoods.

The Foundation maintains its accounts in accordance with accepted financial norms and is audited annually by the Royal Audit Authority of Bhutan. An audited financial report and an annual progress report are published every year and is available for all interested individuals and organizations.

Please contact us for more information.

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From the Tarayana School Clubs (Conti....page 7)

Time does fly by when you are having so much fun. For me the week felt like an hour, and the time for goodbyes came too soon. The last night no one slept. We talked as if there was no tomorrow. We laughed, sang and danced. When the sun came up, there was an eerie silence. Everyone was sad. Breakfast was miserable. We could hardly swallow our food, for we were on the verge of tears and our throat closed up trying to hold back the tears. Dragging our feet, we collected our luggage and headed to the bus. We wished we could all be together for one more week. The Tibetan group saw us off and that made it even harder for us to leave. All the girls cried. We could not hold it back anymore. We hugged our friends and said our farewells, promising to keep in touch.

All the way back to Bhutan, hardly anyone said a word. Everyone was trying to reminisce about the biggest life-changing experience of our young lives. Back in our own country, reunited with our family and friends, we still feel a chasm left by the absence of our new friends. Now that we are back to our normal routine, we still hold on to that memory. We exchange letters and gifts. We call each other and share our experiences. We have all become a part of each other’s lives.

The best memories are the ones that stay with when you close your eyes at night and the ones that remain when you open your eyes in the morning. The trip to Kolkata is one such memory and I have the Tarayana Foundation to thank. All our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the Foundation for giving us the privilege to change our own lives.

Sonam Pema
Class X A
Loselling MSS