Welcome to the very first issue of the Tarayana Newsletter. As an organization Tarayana has grown from an entity supporting vulnerable individuals to an organisation that is revitalising entire communities. For the ‘Taraites’, as the officials and volunteers are affectionately called by the President, I am sure it has been a wonderful six years working for the underprivileged and vulnerable in making their lives a little brighter and better. Of course, the road has not always been easy – sometimes insufficient financial and human resources prevented us from reaching out to all who needed support. But all in all it has been a fulfilling six years both for those who work at Tarayana and those for whom the Foundation works. For us volunteers it is always with pride that we associate ourselves with the Foundation and its noble cause.

This newsletter is intended to give you an update on Tarayana’s recent activities as well as insights into our activities that touch the lives of people in some of the most rural communities. Our involvement ranges from developing proper rural housing and empowering village women through skills development to needs-based training for school matrons to ensure good care for rural school children.

In this issue, we will provide you with anecdotes and stories, like the one on the ‘Grasshopper’ as named by one of the volunteers. And how can we forget our friends from Surgicorps International who come every year to ensure that there are no Bhutanese left with hare lip and cleft palate. Read about their work and the recent event that made us feel euphoric.

It definitely is a rewarding experience for Tarayana and all our supporters. So, be a part of the Tarayana family – and read on.

Chhimmy Pem, Tarayana Volunteer

Greetings from the President

It gives us great pleasure to welcome all readers to the Tarayana Newsletter through which we hope to keep you better connected to our activities and progress. This quarterly newsletter will bring progress updates and community expressions to you our stakeholders, members, volunteers, donors and anyone interested in community empowerment and development activities.

As Tarayana turns six in the service of the most needy, we are happy to note that significant inroads have been made in poverty reduction. All Olep families now have a proper house to live in, irrigation for their fields and a little extra cash in their pockets. The Lhops have for the first time in their living history taken major developmental decisions for their own improvement. Slowly but surely, socio-economic transformation is taking place in village after village at a pace that is astounding now that the communities are motivated as well as confident in what they can do to help themselves.

Our sincere congratulations to all the grassroots committees responsible for the implementation of all these progressive activities in the villages. We also commend the high level of cooperation and camaraderie that is accorded by the various functionaries of the local government at the Dzongkhag as well as Geog level to our field officers. Let me also take this opportunity to send a special ‘thank you’ to all the Tarayana Field Officers and volunteers for the services rendered so far. As front runners of the organization, you are the face and the voice of the Foundation and your output and sincerity makes the world of difference in restoring dignity and confidence in our remote rural communities.

Happy Sixth Birthday to the Tarayana family and friends around the world.

Tashi Delek!

Her Majesty Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck

“In Touch
Tarayana Newsletter Vol 1 Issue 1- May 2009

Greetings from the President

It gives us great pleasure to welcome all readers to the Tarayana Newsletter through which we hope to keep you better connected to our activities and progress. This quarterly newsletter will bring progress updates and community expressions to you our stakeholders, members, volunteers, donors and anyone interested in community empowerment and development activities.

As Tarayana turns six in the service of the most needy, we are happy to note that significant inroads have been made in poverty reduction. All Olep families now have a proper house to live in, irrigation for their fields and a little extra cash in their pockets. The Lhops have for the first time in their living history taken major developmental decisions for their own improvement. Slowly but surely, socio-economic transformation is taking place in village after village at a pace that is astounding now that the communities are motivated as well as confident in what they can do to help themselves.

Our sincere congratulations to all the grassroots committees responsible for the implementation of all these progressive activities in the villages. We also commend the high level of cooperation and camaraderie that is accorded by the various functionaries of the local government at the Dzongkhag as well as Geog level to our field officers. Let me also take this opportunity to send a special ‘thank you’ to all the Tarayana Field Officers and volunteers for the services rendered so far. As front runners of the organization, you are the face and the voice of the Foundation and your output and sincerity makes the world of difference in restoring dignity and confidence in our remote rural communities.

Happy Sixth Birthday to the Tarayana family and friends around the world.

Tashi Delek!

Her Majesty Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck

“Happiness is ...
... caring, sharing and being part of other’s happiness.”

Toshihiro Tanaka, Former Dy. Resident Representative, UNDP Bhutan

His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, and Their Majesties the Queen Mothers hosted a special lunch at Dechenchholing Palace for the Surgicorp Team attending the 4th Surgical Camp. (Story on Page 4)
In just two years the indigenous Olep community of Rukha (Wangduephodrang) has experienced a huge socio-economic transformation in their lives. Every family in the village now has a proper home constructed by the community. They have also improved their livelihood opportunities and created a village of happiness.

All interested community members were trained in basic carpentry and masonry skills by a local master carpenter and the instructor and trainees of the Construction Training Centre. The families then drew lots to determine the order of house construction and worked together in building one house at a time. Thus in eighteen months, fifteen families were adequately housed while learning new skills. Two Oleps apprentices to the master carpenter have now become lead carpenters. They are now currently engaged in teaching the indigenous Monpa community of Trongsa the skills of building proper houses. Traditional house building skills have been found to be very popular in many remote villages as these skills directly translate into improved homes.

As a further source of income for the Oleps, some traditional handicrafts were revived. The products are now sold through the Tarayana Rural Craft as well as during fairs and festivals. To improve family nutrition, seeds, small tools and training in organic farming were provided, which has led to an improvement in their diet. The upcoming Punatshangchu Hydro Power Project is a potential market for all the fruits and vegetables that can be grown in the villages. All these activities have been implemented by local volunteer committees thereby ensuring better ownership as well as sustainability of the various interventions taken up.

The project has changed the lives of the individuals and strengthened the community. It provided them the opportunities and skills needed to experience true participation in their own empowerment and gain confidence steadily leading them out of the poverty trap. The community has become stronger than before with all families working together to effect collective transformation. When one visits Rukha today, the children are eager to share their learning accomplishments while the families are happy to welcome guests to their newly constructed houses, exhibit their crafts and show their vegetable gardens bursting with new varieties. Currently the Olep have started to rebuild their community Lhakhang that was in ruins till now. Their labour contribution is free while the carpenter has agreed to work on a 50% payment for his service. Tarayana is presently trying to mobilize funds for this initiative.

Rukha has proven to be a sustainable successful model of ‘Integrated Community Development’. We are grateful UNV/UNDP for funding this project. Tarayana Foundation is already replicating this approach in five villages Athang Geog with support from JICA/UNDP.

Sonam Pem (Offtg. Director of Programmes)

Joint forces for Rukha create exceptional synergy

Complementing the UNV/UNDP/Tarayana project, GEF Small Grants Program Support funded ‘Alternative livelihood options for the indigenous community of Rukha’. Through this, the Olep community was able to better tap the available water source, enabling them to irrigate fields left fallow for many years due to insufficient water thus reducing the seasonal food shortages the communities faced. In addition, the indigenous method preserving food such as nya dosem (smoked fish) was revived with additional fish ponds. The sale of nya dosem brings in extra cash income for the community.

Tarayana currently supports the community in improving post-harvest handling of their produce, small value addition initiatives while seeking to provide the villagers with environmentally friendly technologies to reduce their dependence on firewood and the forest. Solar home lighting systems will also be provided, through a joint initiative with SGP and the Barefoot College of Tilonia, Rajasthan.

The project activities have additionally been supported by the Department of Livestock, the RNR extension officer, the forest officer as well as the health assistant creating an exceptional synergy in how the community is collectively served. The difference made by the cooperation between the service providers and the grassroot people has to be experienced to be believed. The Olep are fortunate to continue to feel the difference of a sensitive synergy working for them.

Project Team
When building their permanent houses, all villagers of Rukha counted on each other: One house after another was constructed and everyone was happy to help, knowing that their own turn would be coming soon.

Only Zhangba, a 35-year-old father of three teenage children, living in a bamboo shack had to be reminded to take up his work every morning. He would rather sleep till midday, roam around without a care in the world, play his dramnen (lute) and drink local ara while the whole village was busy helping each other with house construction. He did not believe that it was possible for a very poor community to build houses for every family and did not bother helping his fellow villagers.

His view changed dramatically when he saw steady completion of house after house and his turn was soon arriving. Suddenly he realised that if the others did not help him because of his past behaviour he would be the only one without a new permanent house. Zhangba wished that the working days would be longer and the nights shorter waking up every now and then thinking it was already dawn and time to get to work. He realized more and more, how important every single person’s contribution was to meet the target and how many difficulties he must have caused the others by his apathetic behaviour.

By the time his house was constructed, not only did Zhangba have a new house but his attitude has also changed significantly.

The “grasshopper” had become more responsible. From then on, he came to help build all the remaining houses and never missed a day of work.

Today, Zhangba is setting an example as a hard working assistant carpenter constructing houses in the neighbouring villages and earns his own wages. He even hopes to become a master carpenter in the future. And he is thankful to the same field officer who always had to remind him to contribute his share of labour at the beginning of the project.

Sonam Pem (Offtg. Director of Programs) 
and Pasang Tobgay (Field Officer)
In Touch
Tarayana Newsletter

“Hands that make the smiles”

Looking good and feeling healthy contributes significantly in making an individual happy and confident in facing the world. For those who are born with harelips and cleft palates not only do they suffer from speech disabilities and eating problems, they also face huge psychological trauma that erodes confidence. We have seen them lose out on many aspects of job opportunities and they remain socially awkward avoiding being seen and slowly retreat to being wall flowers.

Her Majesty’s visit to Nagor village in Mongar in 1999 highlighted the need for reconstructive surgeries to give many the opportunities of leading healthy and productive lives. The camps not only helped correct congenital deformities but also reached out to those with burns and disfigurements due to bear mauling and accidents. The first camp was held in 2004 (Paro and Punakha) where 49 cases were attended to from a list of 66 patients. It was conducted with the help of Duang-Kaew Foundation, an organization of volunteer plastic surgeons and nurses from Thailand.

The last three camps were organized in cooperation with Surgicorps International, a non-profit volunteer organization from USA that provides medical care, training and supplies to developing nations. Surgicorps held their first camp in Bhutan at the Paro District Hospital in 2007 where 72 procedures were conducted for patients coming from all parts of the country including three bear mauled patients. The third camp was held in 2008 where 104 people showed up for the screening and a list of 51 was prepared of which 38 patients received reconstructive surgeries. This year for the 4th camp 180 people turned up for the screening of which 73 were put on the list and 65 patients received treatment. Forty have already been screened and asked to attend the next camp in 2010.

These camps have been held in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and with institutional support from our local doctors, nurses and technicians. His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo and Their Majesties the Queen Mothers hosted a special lunch at the Dechenchholing Palace on April 18th for the Surgicorps team. The Minister for Health and the Secretary, Ministry of Health were also invited to the Lunch.

In Brief

Six new barefoot solar engineers trained to electrify their villages
In collaboration with The Barefoot College of Tilonia, Rajasthan and donors such as Small Grants Program, Fondation Ensemble and the Government of India, six women from non-electrified villages were sent on a six-months training in solar technology. Besides the technical knowledge to become competent solar engineers, the women have gained immense self-confidence. They are currently in the process of setting up their workshops in the villages.

Peacecomm: An exchange project
Tarayana is the fourth partner in the Exchange project titled PEACECOMM, funded by Fredskorpsset (fk) Norway. The project fosters capacity development through an exchange of personnel between partner countries. Tarayana has sent Mr. Tshering Wangdi, cameraman, to Environmental Broadcast Circle (EBC), the leading partner, for a 10 months hands-on-learning of audio/visual programming. Through this project Tarayana hopes to improve documentation skills within the Foundation.

Second phase of Helvetas support moving ahead
As one of Tarayana Foundation’s most steady partners, Helvetas is supporting the Foundation for another three years in improving rural livelihood opportunities as well as strengthening institutional development. Activities such as skills training in masonry and carpentry to achieve improved house building capacities, organic farming initiatives for better nutrition and income generation, resumption of traditional crafts as potential income sources and the formation of self-help groups to help themselves are being taken up.
**Marketing rural crafts**

Tarayana Rural Crafts market products made by self-help groups from five dzongkhags. This includes rural communities of Silambi, Lotokuchu, Rukha, Langthel, Baling, Endocholing, Langdurbi, Digila and Zurphey. The products range from nettle fabric, candles, soaps, daphne paper, clay pots, wooden masks, cane and bamboo baskets, handwoven cotton and silk textiles. All the communities undergo ecologically friendly and sustainable harvesting and local resources management training.

These products are sold directly by the self-help groups at their workshed outlets as well as by the Tarayana Rural Craft shops located in Thimphu and Lobesa. Tarayana Rural Craft also takes orders for the supply of special items like folders and bags made from these handwoven fabrics.

Tarayana Rural Craft is a Fair Price Shop operating on behalf of the communities served by Tarayana. The prices are thus very competitive and there are always good buys at any given time that benefits both the self-help groups as well as the buyers.

To create further awareness of the communities’ products, increase their sale and thus generate more income for the communities Tarayana Rural Craft also participates in national and other craft festivals throughout the year. As of now, the products are also supplied to some of the high-end hotels both directly by some of our self-help groups and also through Tarayana.

In our efforts to enhance product quality and encourage innovation, the skills of the self-help groups are upgraded periodically. Some representatives nominated by the self-help groups are also sent on study tours outside Bhutan. Quality assurance and presentation of the products continue to challenge the groups and Tarayana Rural Crafts. High transportation costs also reduce the profit margin for our rural artisans. Tarayana Rural Crafts is currently looking for ways and means to improve quality and design as well as diversity products.

*Karma Choden, Marketing Officer*

---

**In Brief**

**Six specially trained matrons placed in rural community schools**
To meet the urgent needs of rural childcare, six matrons have been trained through UNESCO and placed at Sha Tasha Community Primary School in Wangdue, Sengdhen Community Primary School Samtse, and Jangbi Community Primary School in Trongsa.

**Promotion of medicinal, aromatic and natural dye plants**
Tarayana is currently implementing the Medicinal, Aromatic and Dye Plants Project in collaboration with the National Organic Programme. This project is funded by IFAD and executed by FAO as a regional project in India and Bhutan. Farmers in nine villages of Trongsa and Zhemgang will benefit from this project.

**Tarayana Rural Craft at Paro Tsechu 2009**
Tarayana Rural Craft shop participated at the annual Paro Tsechu Fair for the first time this year. Besides selling the rural artisan products made by the self-help groups from our communities, we also gained insights in product pricing and better understood the quality and types of crafts in demand.

**Number of Tarayana School Clubs Increase**
Over the last year, the number of Tarayana School Clubs has increased by 16, reaching a total of 81 clubs with a volunteer population of 4,369 students. The clubs are committed to helping our rural communities close to their particular schools – thus instilling the critical values such as volunteerism and social responsibility among the Bhutanese Youth.
Nettle or stinging nettle is a perennial plant growing in temperate and tropical wastelands around the world. It grows two to four meters high and produces pointed leaves and white to yellowish flowers. Nettle has a well-known reputation for giving a savage sting when the skin touches the hairs and bristles on the leaves and stems.

Nettle fibers have been woven out of the stalks of the old nettle by the women of Baling community, Trongsa. Today, twenty one women from the community actively weave nettle fabric and nine elderly women help with spin nettle yarn using drop spindles, after finishing their field work. They weave in the work shed which is facilitated by solar light. To make the whole production and management process easier, they have formed a working group and appointed a chairperson and an accountant to monitor the weaving group’s performance. The group has opened a weavers’ bank account to save money for buying weaving materials such as dyes. The weavers have been trained in Bengal natural dyeing process, which enabled them to give different color to the weave. They also cultivate and process the dye plants themselves. Among others, the end products are sold to tourist and high-end hotels in the country.

To enhance the skills of weavers in Bhutan, DOT (Department of Trade) conducted Laotian loom training for weavers in Bhutan, with the master weaver from Baling attending the training. DOT kindly donated a Laotian loom to the nettle weaving center. Some of the members were also given training in basic tailoring and apparel design training.

**Procedure for making nettle fabric**
Daphne Paper Making Centre, Lotokuchu Jigme, Samtse

Daphne paper and its products are made by a small help group of Lhops from Lotokuchu, Samtse, known as Desho in local dialects. They come to work during the weekends and after their days work in the fields as the Centre has solar lights. The production of Daphne paper is done in the traditional methods by hand. It is time consuming, but with the lack of electricity or a generator, it has not been possible to use labour saving small machines and equipment. The sheets were being dried on the walls of the centre during the rainy season. However, with the provision of aluminum sheets, better drying is possible thus enhancing better product finish. Local dyes, pine-needles, barks and different flower petals are used in the process to create different colors and patterns. Among others, paper products made by the Lhop Community include lamp shades, writing pads, notebooks, envelopes, paper sheets and photo frames. The committee markets the products themselves as far as possible and with support from the Tarayana Rural Crafts where necessary. Currently 14 members of the Lhop self-help group work and manage the “paper factory.”
**From the Tarayana School Clubs**

Tarayana School Clubs – it’s about mass cleaning campaigns of schools and community places; it’s about supporting needy students who cannot afford school books, uniforms or fees, it’s about teaching English to monks and tutoring weaker students; it’s about collecting food for impounded dogs and bringing firewood to senior citizens and retreatants; it’s about doing ginger plantation for a widow and helping a fellow student’s family at harvesting time; it’s about visiting and taking care of a paralysed and bedridden man who has no one to take care of him; it’s about saving a schoolmate from being molested by her own father and placing her at a boarding school; it’s about helping the rural communities and needy individuals close to the schools; it’s about giving of one’s time and energy in the service of others and about taking social responsibility and instilling the spirit of volunteerism among the Bhutanese Youth.

These are some of the activities that keep at least 4369 volunteer student members of 81 Tarayana School Clubs engaged in the service of those in need. The number of clubs have grown over the years with an increase of 16 new clubs in the past year. The above mentioned activities are just some examples of what is achieved by these young and dedicated volunteers. Their experiences need to be shared – and from the next issue on, you will find one of those amazing and interesting stories in this space, written by the Tarayana School Club members themselves.

Roseleen Gurung,
Programme Officer and Coordinator,
Tarayana School Clubs

---

**Up coming Events May & June 2009**

- May 2-4: Tarayana Fair, Clock Tower Square, Thimphu
- May 9-14: Monitoring visit to Jangbi Langthel Geog, Trongsa
- May 13-27: Tarayana Staff Training, RDTC, Zhemgang
- June 10: Inauguration of Tarayana Centre
- June 25: Lhops in Focus - a photo exhibition

---

**Support Tarayana**

You help the most vulnerable members of our society when you support Tarayana. We operate on the financial support and generosity of individuals and organizations.

The Foundation maintains its accounts in accordance with accepted financial norms and is audited annually by the Royal Audit Authority of Bhutan.

Please contact us for more information.

---

Tarayana Foundation, P.O. Box 2003, Tarayana Centre, Chubachu, Thimphu, Bhutan
Phone: 975-2-329-333 Fax: 975-2-331-433 tarayana@druknet.bt
www.tarayanafoundation.org