Tarayana Centre for Social Research and Development

TCSRD
Research Strategy
2017-2021
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The Research Strategy 2017-2021 will guide the action-oriented research that TCSRD will undertake in the years ahead. I am happy that the action-oriented research in our communities will be documented and published. I am confident that the findings will contribute towards evidenced-based policy decisions that benefit our rural communities.

Tarayana’s services in the remotest villages over the past fifteen years have contributed to profound socio-economic transformation. Tarayana continues to empower the grassroots to take active part in all aspects of their own development and progress. I am happy to note that in helping our remote rural communities to help themselves, Tarayana too has grown in confidence, experience and expertise.

This strategy document is the outcome of multi-tiered in-depth reflections and is relevant to the evolving needs of both the communities we serve as well as to those in the area of holistic rural development.

Tashi Delek!

Her Majesty Gyalyum Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck
Founder and President
From the Secretary General

Tarayana has come of age where research and evidenced-based decisions are expected to be documented and shared in order to contribute towards rural development policies.

This Research Strategy provides the framework that allows for more focused action-oriented research and documentation on key issues. Much of the socio-economic analysis and work we have undertaken so far is not known beyond the organization. We have the opportunity to be actively engaged in sharing our knowledge in international peer-reviewed journals and national journals, as well as through our regular working paper, book and research seminar series. The time has come to have these fascinating stories of holistic rural development shared through these media to a wider audience of change agents.

I am grateful to all who have worked behind the scenes and the invaluable work that has gone into all the various rounds of consultations in drafting and operationalizing this action-oriented research strategy.

A big ‘Thank You’ to the TCSRDS team. I wish the Centre great success.

Chime P. Wangdi
Secretary General
Knowledge for Holistic Development with Values

Action-oriented research and documentation of social, economic and cultural dynamics contributing to the maximization of happiness, wellbeing, harmony, ecological resilience and the life improvement of vulnerable rural communities in Bhutan
As the Tarayana Foundation celebrates its 15th year in 2018, the context in which it works to serve the most vulnerable communities in remote regions of Bhutan continues to transform in response to wider drivers of change.

The implementation of the Tarayana Foundation’s development programs and activities are in transition in response to changes in different contexts and at different levels from the local to the national. Rapid socio-cultural, economic and ecological changes are taking place that bring about new dynamics and stresses on livelihoods, ecosystems, culture and community vitality. Rural-urban migration, time-use pressures, environmental degradation, limited livelihood opportunities, increasing issues of waste management, social exclusion, changes in psychological wellbeing, rapid cultural change, and limited access to development opportunities are among the issues experienced by remote communities in rural Bhutan. There are also shifts in the way international development takes place, with growing expectations from the supporters of the Foundation.

In the face of rapid changes, critical gaps remain in terms of evidence-based research, integrated approaches engaging both qualitative and quantitative methods, and the systematic understanding and documentation of development effects. The need for research driving development is rapidly gaining prominence in Bhutan, with efforts such as the creation of new research centres, scholarly journals, institutionalization of research associates for parliamentarians, and graduate and doctoral programs. Through these transitions, the generation of rigorous knowledge, documentation, dissemination, policy influence, understanding and systematic documentation of impacts, and monitoring and evaluation of the Foundation’s efforts are becoming increasingly relevant.

The Tarayana Foundation remains committed to maximizing happiness and harmony among all Bhutanese people by providing opportunities to vulnerable rural communities in Bhutan. By helping community members learn and integrate new skills, the Foundation promotes self-empowerment and advances the importance of collective efforts and service. Knowledge generation and sharing has been an integral part of its work, and will be strengthened through the new research wing of the Tarayana Foundation: the Tarayana Centre for Social Research and Development. The new Centre will strengthen ongoing efforts, centrally reflect the Tarayana Foundation’s vision and mission, as well as compliment the efforts of the Royal Government of Bhutan towards improving the wellbeing of the nation.
What Makes TCSRD Distinctive

TCSRD: A Tribute to the Birth Anniversary of our Honorable President

The Tarayana Centre for Social Research and Development (TCSRD) was established on June 10\textsuperscript{th}, 2015 to commemorate the 60\textsuperscript{th} Birth Anniversary of the Honorable Founder and President of the Tarayana Foundation, Her Majesty Queen Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck. Its establishment was also endorsed by the Tarayana Foundation’s Board during its 23\textsuperscript{rd} meeting. Located at the Tarayana Centre in Thimphu, TCSRD is evolving into a think tank and centre of excellence in action-oriented social research for development with a larger mandate in Bhutan. Grounded in a bottom-up approach, it aspires to become a premiere institute for action-oriented research that informs and influences national, regional and international policy debates and development practices.

The Research Arm of the Tarayana Foundation

The Tarayana Centre for Social Research and Development is the research, documentation and monitoring and evaluation wing of the Tarayana Foundation. Established in 2003, the Foundation is a public benefit organization registered with the civil society organization Authority of Bhutan. It works to support, uplift and enhance the lives of vulnerable individuals and communities in Bhutan. Under the guidance and leadership of Her Majesty Queen Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, the Foundation works with rural communities in remote areas of Bhutan in the fight against multi-dimensions of poverty. It does so by complementing the efforts of the Royal Government of Bhutan in promoting prosperity and wellbeing, and is guided by seminal documents such as Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness, and the Constitution of the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan.
Rationale

Since becoming a democracy, Bhutan has undergone profound socio-cultural, political-economic and ecological change. The pace of development change is considerable, even as long-term national aspirations are sometimes sacrificed at the cost of short-term populist gains. These changes are felt by society at large, but especially impact grassroots communities and vulnerable peoples in particular. Multiple drivers of change are rapidly morphing in a myriad ways that need to be documented and analyzed by researchers, development practitioners, and communities themselves. While there is a growing number of scholarly research institutes in the country geared to document such changes from an academic and scholarly perspective, there exists urgent gaps in terms of action-oriented research that enhances development processes to directly help the most vulnerable communities in remote areas of Bhutan. TCSRD exemplifies development innovation, as one of Bhutan’s first community-oriented, CSO-run social research institute and think tank.

Background

This Centre is home to both pre-existing and ongoing research that documents social change pathways, including development outcomes and impacts brought about by the Foundation’s programs. As an established CSO in Bhutan with a decade and a half of experience and sustained presence on the ground, the Foundation has nurtured trust, social capital and generated research relevant data regarding the changing dynamics and challenges faced by rural communities it supports and serves in remote areas of the country. It has identified critical gaps in knowledge and action-oriented research that help to solve problems facing the most vulnerable communities. This provides guidance on evidence-based decision-making as communities manage their development and progress in an inclusive and holistic manner. Knowledge generated and lessons learnt through action-oriented research and rigorous analysis enables the Centre to co-exist as a think tank and hub for rural development and social studies, attracting both national and international collaboration.
Research Objectives

TCSRD will contribute to the Tarayana Foundation in realizing its vision of a happy and prosperous Bhutan by working towards three strategic research objectives.

1. To carry out action-oriented social development research in the areas of socio-cultural landscapes, political ecology, behavioral science, indigenous knowledge and rural innovation that ensures that bottom-up knowledge and actionable research generated by the Centre supports and informs social policy initiatives in Bhutan.

2. To enhance development efforts by creating a repository of knowledge from rural development initiatives of the Tarayana Foundation, and to provide networking opportunities, knowledge-sharing and linkages amongst researchers, scholars, practitioners and other agencies in Bhutan.

3. To develop social change pathways and theories of change (monitoring and evaluation) that help to assess the impacts of the Centre’s own interventions on the ground.

Key Areas of Work

The objectives above are directly linked to and translated into five key areas of work.

The main objective of TCSRD is to become one of Bhutan’s first CSO-run think tanks for action-oriented social research grounded in people’s lived realities, in order to influence key development debates and policy dialogues. Five specific objectives help to fulfill this aspiration. The first is to carry out action-oriented social development research in areas such as socio-cultural landscapes, political ecology, behavioral science, indigenous knowledge, and rural innovation. This includes trans-disciplinary research and ethnographic studies of indigenous and ethnic minority groups, focusing on rural transformations as a result of interventions, including environmental and social impacts. The second objective is to become an important repository of knowledge emanating from the rural and social development initiatives of the Tarayana Foundation, as well as other agencies in the country. This also entails sharing knowledge widely that highlights the impacts created through these initiatives on the lives of Bhutanese women, men and children, as well as supporting training and capacity strengthening to generate such knowledge. The third is to develop social change pathways and theories of change (monitoring and evaluation) that help to assess the impacts of the Centre’s own interventions on the ground. Fourth, is to ensure that bottom-up knowledge and actionable research generated by the Centre supports and informs social policy initiatives in Bhutan. Fifth, is to provide networking opportunities and linkages amongst researchers, scholars and practitioners to enhance development efforts. Such opportunities include action-oriented research internships to help strengthen the capacity of young Bhutanese scholars.
Key Area

Knowledge Sharing

TCSRD is committed to sharing widely knowledge generated from research, policy engagement, workshops, trainings, local consultations and conferences through scholarly journal articles, research reports, conference and workshop proceedings, community feedback sessions and through its regular TCSRD series of working research papers, books, research seminars and policy briefs. It will also translate and disseminate research knowledge for wider audiences through social media and local community platforms. All information about these outputs are available on the TCSRD dedicated page on the Tarayana Foundation’s website: www.tarayanafoundation.org/tarayana-centre-social-research-development and facebook page: www.facebook.com/TCSRD.

Key Area

Bottom-Up Action-Oriented Research

TCSRD engages in bottom-up research that deepens understanding of social, cultural, environmental, political and institutional dimensions of poverty, inequality and sustainability in Bhutan, while promoting and supporting solutions to help vulnerable communities and individuals prosper and enhance their wellbeing. TCSRD takes a trans-disciplinary learning-by-doing action research approach that is grounded in community experiences, and progressively solves problems over time that empower communities through meaningful participation.
Key Area
Social Change Pathways

TCSRD is developing impact pathways that document and assess the socio-cultural, environmental and political-economic effects of the Centre’s interventions. Moving Beyond an approach focusing on technical tools for monitoring and evaluation, such efforts are centred on theories of change, or social change pathways, that are interested in deeper reflective processes that considers complexity, flexibility, dynamism, and context-specificity of development initiatives. Social change pathways are engaged to foster participatory dialogue and bottom-up research regarding values and philosophies of change that make explicit the underlying assumptions of what, how and why change happens as an outcome of the Centre’s initiatives.

Key Area
Policy Dialogue and Influence

TCSRD focuses on actionable research that informs and supports decision makers to shape inclusive policies and practices that enhance the livelihoods and wellbeing of vulnerable communities and individuals. It aims to provide knowledge, stimulate discussion, participate in and contribute to broader policy processes at the district and national level, in collaboration with government, civil society organizations, research institutes and policy-oriented organizations. TCSRD collaborates with researchers, advisors, consultants, reviewers, and evaluators to enable dialogue processes.

Key Area
Linkages and Networks

The Tarayana Foundation maintains close working relations with a wide network of research institutes and development organizations in Bhutan, as well as regionally and internationally. Institutional partnerships and linkages include joint research projects, collaborative trainings, exchange programmes, internships, and collaboration with like-minded visiting scholars. Long-established partnerships exist with key development organizations in Bhutan, important intergovernmental organizations such as United Nations programmes, multi-lateral organizations, and institutions in countries such as Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Canada and others.

Knowledge Sharing

TCSRD is committed to sharing widely knowledge generated from research, policy engagement, workshops, trainings, local consultations and conferences through scholarly journal articles, research reports, conference and TCSRD | 7
Priority Research Themes

In 2016, TCSRD organized a series of workshops with the Foundation’s field officers, program officers and executive committee. These workshops were aimed at stock-taking of research, knowledge generation and methodological elements of past initiatives, as well as over-viewing current projects, and visioning action-oriented research for the future. This document is a result of these efforts, and will inform programs, action-oriented research, monitoring and evaluation, as well as donors, partners and beneficiaries. It compliments the Tarayana Foundation’s institutional strategy. Through the TCSRD Research Strategy, the Tarayana Foundation will continue to strengthen modalities and mechanisms for achieving its objectives, through action-oriented, action and actionable research. Several priority research themes have been identified and prioritized from 2017 to 2021.

Theme
Climate Change Adaptation and Ecological Resilience

The threat of climate change is having adverse effects on vulnerable communities in remote areas of Bhutan. Stress on ecosystems and natural resources is increasing, threatening the wellbeing of humans, their environment and all sentient beings. The most marginalized and vulnerable groups of people are most affected by the negative aspects of climate change.

TCSRD will:
- Carry out action-oriented research on sustainable low carbon green technologies (micro-hydro, solar dryers, eco-friendly farming, improved stoves and construction materials, etc.), rainwater harvesting, food security, and sustainable land and natural resource management.
- Strengthen research capacity and ensure that research findings are shared and disseminated widely to advance knowledge, influence policy, and document changes in local contexts, including the impacts of its own work.
TCSRD envisions enhancing and expanding livelihood options for vulnerable communities in rural Bhutan, where development resources are sometimes difficult to access and scarce.

**TCSRD will:**

- Carry out action-oriented to document, identify strategies and seek sustainable solutions that support micro-credit, savings schemes, self-help groups, skills trainings and promote entrepreneurship (community shops, dairy framing, eco-friendly farming, etc.) committed to sustainably using and promoting local resources.

- Monitor and evaluate the extent to which people’s livelihoods have improved, both quantitatively and qualitatively, by comparing baseline and ongoing collection of updated data.

Providing life opportunities for improving vulnerable communities requires focused support to the most vulnerable people in those communities.

**TCSRD will:**

- Carry out action-oriented research that documents socio-economic dynamics and seeks solutions to support the most disadvantaged groups, especially youth and women, in terms of early child care and development, development of women’s leadership skills and education, and other areas of support.

- Strive to deepen understanding socio-cultural trends such as rural-urban migration, loss of culture, increased time pressures, rapid changes in community vitality and wellbeing.
Institutional Framework

Core Staff

CSRD’s core members include a group of committed researchers, scholars and professionals with a wide range of expertise in the areas of rural development, social research, social change pathways and related fields. Among them are researchers who have published widely in Bhutanese and international journals, as well as those who have carried out evaluation and monitoring processes of various rural development programmes and initiatives. Core members also collaborate with scholars from other academic institutions in the country and internationally. The Centre provides capacity strengthening trainings as well as support and mentoring for young Bhutanese professionals through sought-after Centre internships.

Operation & Management

A small dedicated core team is tasked with kick-starting the Centre, including renown Bhutanese and international senior advisers and researchers. Following the launch of the Centre’s five-year strategy, the team will expand to include a full time Director, three dedicated researchers, a finance officer and an office assistant. The Centre will become a self-sustaining entity, garnering support from relevant institutions and building its own funds through consultancies, projects, knowledge use products, trainings and sustainability initiatives. A senior Advisory Board of five members will provide the strategic direction for the Centre, composed of imminent members in the field of rural development and social studies. The Board will be chaired by the Secretary General of the Tarayana Foundation, renown researchers from Bhutan and internationally. The Board will consider and endorse sustainability strategies and yearly action plans.
Achieving Success

Agenda for Action

This document was the result of consultative workshops, meetings, reviews and compliments the overall Tarayana Foundation institutional strategy. Following the endorsement of the research strategy by the Board of Trustees in 2016, a strategic action plan for 2017-2021 is being developed, including local needs assessments, overall conceptual framework, methodological approach, theory of change (social change pathways), capacity strengthening approaches, plans for documentation systems (i.e. annual reporting plans, M&E, etc.), communication and dissemination, and a fundraising strategy. Pilot research activities are underway, including the completion of TCSRd’s first pilot research in four Tarayana sites, an inaugural research seminar in 2017, followed by its first research publication and policy brief in 2018, as part of its regular action-oriented research publication series. Concept notes for full-fledged action-oriented research are under development, in response to invitations from national and international research centres. In addition, research action plans will be developed on an annual basis.
Action Research

Achieving success in carrying out this strategy will depend on TCSRD’s ability to learn, adapt and build institutional capacity and organizational culture to advance action-oriented research. As the context in which the Centre continues to change, and as experience and capacities are built, it will be important to balance innovation with responsiveness of the needs of the communities it serves. Building and strengthening an organizational culture of research will also be a priority for the Centre.

TCSRD will:

- Regularly discuss the implementation of the annual plans with the Executive Committee and its Board of Trustees, and adjust the course as needed
- Share progress about TCSRD’s strategy and plans with communities and more widely with the research and development community in Bhutan
- Continuously develop, evaluate and reflect on TCSRD’s programs in a systematic and rigorous manner, learning from both successes and failures, and ensuring research follows the highest ethical standards
- Evaluate the overall implementation of the strategy, in order to inform and plan the next cycle of strategic research programs
- Continually engage in an action-research cycle of planning, implementing, reflecting and adapting, to improve impact in terms of innovative knowledge, actionable research and solving problems that maximize happiness and harmony, and provide opportunities for the life improvement of vulnerable communities in Bhutan

Capacity Strengthening

In order to successfully carry out action-oriented research according to the priority themes, data collection systems (including baselines), methodologies, documentation processes, social change pathways (theory of change, reflexive processes), and research analytical capacities will be developed and strengthened. For instance, developing research capacity will entail the ability to independently:

- Pro-actively identify and define problem areas requiring research that support the needs of remote rural communities
- Design, carry out and analyze research
- Locate research in pertinent national and international debates
- Triangulate research against published research findings
- Take part in and make use of national and international research initiatives
- Evaluate, classify and adapt research
- Publish, disseminate and apply research
- Translate and feedback research to local communities
- Influence policy changes through evidence-based research
- Develop an attractive and innovative research environment and culture
- Develop capacity for maintaining and updating the above areas
Rigorous Action-Oriented and Actionable Research Knowledge

Evidence-based action-oriented research must be scientifically rigorous while aiming to solve the real-life problems and challenges faced by vulnerable communities. It should aim to generate actionable research knowledge that has the ability to influence policy change, engage dialogue and debate in scholarly networks, and be accepted for wider dissemination and publication in peer-reviewed journals. Research findings will be communicated and shared with a wide range of end-users, from the communities themselves, to fellow researchers, policy makers, government officials, and international scholars. Hence, they will be translated and disseminated using a host of approaches ranging from academic articles, presentations, workshops and conferences to locally-oriented radio programs, feedback sessions, info-graphics, documentaries, etc. TCSRD will host a regular research seminar series, and publish regular series of research working papers, books and policy briefs). Most importantly, to achieve these aims, a culture of research will be nurtured within the Centre to ensure the success of TCSRD.

TCSRD will:
- Build a strong and dynamic core TCSRD team of experienced researchers with strong methodological, analytical, communication and writing abilities
- Develop a focused resource mobilization and funding strategy for sustained resources
- Develop concepts notes and proposals to support action-oriented research
- Carry out local needs assessments with remote, vulnerable communities
- Develop an overall conceptual framework, methodological tools, theory of change (social change pathways), documentation systems (i.e. annual reporting plans, M&E, etc.), and communication and dissemination plans
- Carry out capacity development trainings for action-oriented research
Our Partners