



# IN TOUCH

**BHUTAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT NEWS**

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## 500 NEW HOMES

The Tarayana Foundation with support from the American Himalayan Foundation (AHF), an organisation based in the United States of America, has committed to the construction of 500 houses in 62 remote villages spanning across 14 districts of Bhutan. As of August 2019, 255 houses have been completed and 154 are under construction. The remaining 91 houses have yet to be constructed as paper processes are not yet completed, especially ascertaining land ownership as well as completing land use change formalities.

The creation of these homes has a positive impact not only through providing physical and emotional relief but fosters further community spirit. This is done as a result of the community-based approach taken in the construction of these houses. Furthermore, this project helps the communities in helping themselves. Tarayana pays for the skilled labour viz. the master carpenter and the master stone mason, and covers the cost of the roofing materials. A system of labour share is adopted where the community members work together in building these homes. Tarayana Field Officers play the role of facilitators and ensures that there is smooth coordination of all the various aspects that need to be considered in improving the living conditions of the community members. Stronger community cohesion development is a pleasant by-product of helping to build each other's homes in these rural villages.

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The beneficiaries are selected in consultation with the local community and Tarayana field staff to decide which community members are in need the most. The construction of the homes is the first step within the larger framework of improving the lives of vulnerable rural populations. Tarayana field officers use door to door surveys in each community to gather data about current conditions and to see which facilitations could further help the local community, whether that is skills training, increasing agricultural productivity or other activities.



This integrated approach has four main methods to decrease rural vulnerability; (a) create access to liveable homes, (b) enhance vocational and artisanal crafts skills, thus improving production quality, increased innovation and creativity, improved productivity and marketability, (c) improve household level food and nutrition security through increased agricultural productivity and supplemental nutrition through diversification of agricultural produces, while also focusing on improved land and water management and (d) establish a monitoring mechanism and database of community support activities.

The overall goal of the project is in line with Tarayana's mission of helping vulnerable communities help themselves. One big hurdle in rural areas is the supply of certain resources such as Corrugated Galvanised Iron (CGI) sheets for roofs. Traditional thatch roofing does not stand up well to the monsoon rains, by using CGI for roofing the monsoon season is no longer a physical worry for vulnerable communities.

Furthermore, during the monsoon season when house construction activities are limited, the field officers provide identified necessary skills that the community members want. Improved tools and implements to reduce farm labour drudgery are also identified and supplied to the farming self help groups. In addition, financial literacy training, post harvest processing techniques are also facilitated in collaboration with local technical agencies in efforts to diversify rural cash income earning capacities.



## CREATING MEANINGFUL CHANGE

Rural-urban migration has left the most vulnerable people behind in rural areas. Youth who have finished class X and XII move to urban areas in search of work and better opportunities. The people left behind in rural areas tend to be the older generation who are not physically capable of cultivating crops. In 2016, 53% of rural farming households reported that the main constraint they faced with regard to raising crops is labour shortage. In today's age of social media and technology demanding our attention, taking things for granted is part and parcel of living the urban life. Nowhere is an oversight of our attention in Bhutan more present than with regards to the rural areas. Urban dwellers see a home with insulation, impermeable roof and indoor plumbing as a standard. Many rural areas however do not have proper shelter with sufficient insulation and hygiene facilities. Tarayana Foundation identified the need to improve living conditions in rural areas through the Housing Improvement Programme for a multitude of benefits it would bring. By focusing on integrated community development, Tarayana achieves a holistic change in the lives of rural people.

Pema Wangchuk from Drameykha village under Gakiling Gewog in Haa, is 43 years old and he used to live with his five member family in a one room hut. Coming from a humble family with heavy financial issues, he told our field officer how harsh life has been on them without knowledge, support or the capacity to pursue anything. The households around Pema decided he should be one of the beneficiaries of the housing project. He, in conjunction with the community and Tarayana, has now successfully completed a four room home. He wondered how it would have ever been possible if it weren't for AHF project. When asked how he now feels, he happily says, "We have grown better together; we have bigger smiles, and more than half of our problems have already been solved. We are most grateful for the support and have stronger reason to work harder than before". The creation of this home for Pema not only provides him physical shelter but has encouraged him to start improving other aspects of his life. Pema is currently engaged in working on his farmlands to boost his agricultural production and is happy with all the facilitation and support he has been receiving. Tarayana Foundation sees helping Pema and others like him as instrumental in helping vulnerable rural communities develop. Having a decent home and means of earning some cash income, provide the necessary incentive to rural youth returning to their villages, now that communication networks have also improved.

**"I could not build a house ever on my own. Not only me but the whole village now has steady homes."**





Distribution of avocado saplings at Haa during the agricultural season, with support from the American Himalayan Foundation

## A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

Abir Maya Rai is 63 years old and has six children. She lives with her younger son and daughter-in-law in a hut, without proper windows, at Dechenling village under Chudzom gewog in Sarpang dzongkhag. Abir Maya Rai's house is a five hours walk from the gewog centre.

One has to cross steep terrains and walk through the thick forest to reach the scattered and completely landlocked Dechenling village. Abir Maya has a large family and she was not able to afford a proper shelter for them. She was living a difficult life with constant fear of natural disasters and wild animals harming her family members. Her old house was also without a proper toilet and it was hard to maintain hygiene and sanitation.

The Foundation with support from the American Himalayan Foundation helped her build a proper house that the entire family is proud of. Words fail her when she wants to convey her gratitude, but the bright smiles on all their faces are reward enough for the Tarayana team to keep forging ahead with our "service from the heart".





## HOUSING PROGRAMME EXPANDS TO CHHUKHA

Metekha is the smallest gewog under Chhukha dzongkhag and is divided into five chewogs. It is located six hours away from the main highway and it is the first time for the Foundation to intervene with the housing improvement programme in this gewog. 33 households under this gewog has received support from the Tarayana Foundation through the AHF Housing Improvement Project.



One of the beneficiaries under this project is Sonam Tshering and his family. Sonam Tshering and his wife, Passang Wangmo have three children. They live in Gumina village under Metekha gewog. He was a day labourer and undertook manual labour to feed his family. Passang Wangmo herded cattle. The couple initially enrolled their three children in school but after some time it was difficult for them to meet the expenses, therefore, they send their son to become a monk.

This household lacked basic sanitary amenities and did not even have kitchen utensils. They used to live in a cowshed and about a year ago, they made a hut using cloth and plastic as roof which could not protect them when the monsoon started and the rain water seeped inside.

Sonam Tshering and his family now have a decent home to live in that protects them from the elements. Tears of joy came out from Passang's eyes and she said that her children do not have to suffer living in the muddy hut anymore. The family now has means to maintain sanitation and hygiene with access to piped water. Now the couple is determined to take up farming activities to generate both food and cash income for their family .





## HAPPILY RESETTLED



Mr. Jampel Sonam is 49 years old and is from Dechen Pelri under Samteling block in Saprang district. He has been resettled from a remote village in Zhemgang called Edi. Edi village, one of the most remote villages in the country, is located under Zhemgang Dizongkhag in the south central region of the country. Due to the insurgency of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO) in 2003 and subsequent operation 'all clear', the village has been resettled in their current location for their safety. This community consisting of 41 households with a population of 579 members have been facing difficulties in sustaining themselves with their normal agricultural methods as the land they resettled on was very stony and without a reliable supply of irrigation water. Although there was support from the Government, it was inadequate to help them overcome all the challenges they faced.

Ap Jampel said that they used to live in a bamboo hut which did not provide adequate living space, protection against the natural elements or from wild animals. In the past he had to undertake regular maintenance of his shelter which often gets torn down by the monsoon, leaving the family insecure throughout the season. It was also expensive to carry out the maintenance work as the family had very limited income source. He lives with his two grandparents, siblings, wife and three children.

Before Tarayana's housing project, they used a pit latrine that was constructed a small distance from their hut. Family members, especially women, children, and senior citizens, found it difficult to use it at night. Therefore, these groups ended up resorting to open defecation around the home. The rooms in the old home were compact and it was difficult to maintain basic hygiene standards. Additionally, they did not have a kitchen garden and all vegetables had to be bought from the nearby market. Through the support from the Young Presidents Organisation (YPO) and facilitation from the Tarayana Foundation project on housing improvement, Ap Jampel and his family and 40 additional families in his village qualified to be beneficiaries of the project and they worked together to build their new homes (some still under construction).

The new house gave Ap Jampel and his family members a healthy life with improved sanitation. Today his family has a toilet inside the house, has more privacy, and enjoys an upgraded standard of living. He has further told our field officer that they have managed to maintain a kitchen garden which has surplus vegetables that they are able to sell at the nearby market. As a result of support from YPO and Tarayana's facilitation, he is now able to concentrate more on income generating activities.

Furthermore, Ap Jampel said that the construction of his new house has provided opportunities for him to learn new skills such as carpentry and masonry that has earned him income through construction of other houses. Today his wife and daughter work as committee members in the Compressed Earth Block (CEB) Unit and have received numerous training on the production of hollow blocks. They were able to earn some income through the sale of hollow blocks, c-bricks and interlocking tiles.

Ap Jampel is very thankful to community members for their labour contribution and Tarayana Foundation's facilitation for his new house construction. He also thanks YPO wholeheartedly for their donated roof over the family's head.





## PROSPECTIVE

### THAI PHILANTHROPISTS

Housing improvement for 115 households supported by the Thai Philanthropists Khun Chia-Rug, Phama-ha-A-won, Khun Ra-we-wan, Dr. Pun-Ya-Phat, Rung-na-Pha coordinated by Khun Thana-porn Supavich is well underway. This project is being implemented in Kamati and Trong chewogs under Bjoka gewog of Zhemgang dzongkhag.

As of this publication, community mobilization has been completed whereby eight groups formed for the activities and the community members are gathering raw materials for construction. Timber permits for all the households have been applied for and construction work will begin after the monsoon season.

### SAVE THE CHILDREN AND BVLGARI

In collaboration with Save the Children Bhutan as technical partner and Bvlgari as financier, Tarayana Foundation is able to further three main projects that Save the Children focuses on. The projects are; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), and Housing Improvement Programme.

Under the WASH initiative, Tarayana aims to build one renewable water sanitation facility for 34 households in Barpong village in Zhemgang Dzongkhag to provide clean drinking water and sanitation facilities.

Under the ECCD initiative, the objective is to provide learning and development facilities for children between the ages of 3-5. This will be done by building 2 ECCD centres, one in Barpong village in Zhemgang dzongkhag and one in Durungi village in Pema Gatshel dzongkhag. Fifty eight (58) toddlers will benefit from these facilities and have access to supervised early developmental care.

The 34 families in Barpong currently live in huts, therefore, the project aims to provide all of these families with improved homes.

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