



Handicrafts Association of Bhutan

Towards a vibrant handicrafts sector



Handicrafts of Bhutan

The origins of Bhutanese arts and crafts go back to the 15th century. Two hundred years later, in the 17th century, they were first categorized as Zorig Chusum or "The 13 Arts and Crafts of Bhutan." Today, this invaluable heritage is best preserved in the rural areas, where artisans inherit the skills passed down through generations.

Even today, in the remote village of Khoma, Lhuentse, girls as young as eight weave Kishuthara, or the valley's historically renowned silk patterns. As they grow up, their skills gain a depth and richness of technique not seen in other parts of the country, nor indeed matched in most parts of the world. In rural Trashiyangtse, the exquisite wooden Daapa bowls chiseled from the knots and burls of trees are a specialty, a painstaking craft whose practitioners pass down the ancient skills and techniques of their ancestors

to younger generations in the community.

Elsewhere in Bhutan, artists work meticulously on intricate Thangkas or religious scrolls without varying the minutest details of divine symmetry.

These women who weave rainbows from yarns and the men who skillfully sculpt or paint, who leave their lasting imprints on history, however, do not always receive the recognition that is their due.

We must, therefore, support this important source of community vitality not only for the preservation of our precious heritage but as well to enhance the economic benefits to our rural communities.



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Message from Chairperson



Bhutan has a rich tradition of crafting, using and valuing things created by the human hand. The highly skilled creators who fashioned these handicrafts often perfected their craft over successive generations. They passed on their well-honed skills and methods from father-to-son (or daughter) sometimes, and mother-to-daughter (or son) in other instances.

Today, however, a wide range of cheap plastic, metal and synthetic goods make inroads into our modern lives, threatening to push the kingdom's valued craftspeople, their cultural contributions, lifestyles, and their livelihoods, into the dim recesses of our collective memory.

The handicrafts Association of Bhutan (HAB) was established to promote the works of the artisans and preserve the sanctity of our art and craft which are a part and parcel of our collective culture and identity. Today, 16 years down the line, we have made substantial progress: through HAB our crafts and craftspeople at least have a platform to showcase their works.

HAB is presently implementing several projects to infuse new skills and enable knowledge transfer. Likewise, in partnership with our craftspeople, we are rolling out products that are quintessentially traditional but meet the taste of changing times by embracing innovation. On the market front, we are striving to bridge the gap between potential buyers and craftspeople who dwell in the far-flung rural communities.

However, we still have a long way to go. HAB has to continue to explore avenues, including potential markets beyond Bhutan, to augment the income of the craftspeople so that they are not uprooted from their ancestral homestead having to look for livelihood in towns and cities. HAB must also ensure that our products are not only sustainable but also environmentally friendly, where possible, by promoting the use of locally available natural and organic materials.

Above all, we must not forget that the contributions of our craftspeople may often be unknown and overlooked but the beauty of their intricate creations sings out amid the detritus of disposable goods. They continue to add color to the rich mosaic of the kingdom's vibrant artistic heritage wherever they are found.

Norbu Wangdi
Chairperson
HAB

Activities rolled out during the Covid-19 Pandemic period

During the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, HAB initiated a series of activities. These included a Covid-19 impact survey on the craft sector for the economic stimulus plan in partnership with the TCB, re-skilling of 94 craftspeople laid-off during the pandemic in collaboration with the TCB and SHINE project, and the development of a handicrafts catalogue, an e-commerce portal and a profile for SHINE project's seven target Dzongkhags. Additionally, under the leadership of GrAT, HAB and BAOWE conducted a survey based on which a tourism attractions profile for each of the target Dzongkhags was initiated to enable the rural craftspeople to reap the benefits of tourism.



Handicrafts Catalogue



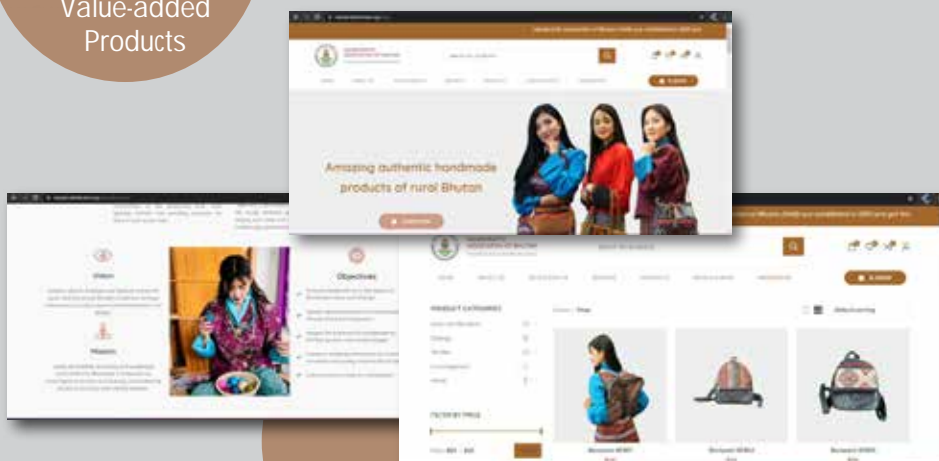
SHINE Project Profile



Value-added Products



Tourism Attractions Profile



E-commerce Portal

Vision

Create a vibrant, authentic and dynamic handicraft sector that showcases Bhutan's traditional heritage and serves as a tool to improve the livelihood of rural Bhutan



Mission

Create an enabling, nourishing and sustainable environment for Bhutanese craftspeople by encouraging innovation and diversity, and facilitating access to local and international markets.

Objectives

- Promote handicrafts as a vital aspect of Bhutanese culture and heritage
- Support skills development of craftspeople through training and exposure
- Support the livelihood of craftspeople by facilitating trade and market linkages
- Create an enabling environment for creativity, innovation and quality in the handicraft industry
- Create access to credit for craftspeople

A woman with dark hair, wearing a traditional Bhutanese garment with a blue collar and a patterned purple and gold shawl, is focused on her craft. She is holding a small, round, green object in her hands. The background shows a wooden wall and a purple curtain. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange banner containing text.

About HAB

The Handicrafts Association of Bhutan (HAB) promotes the work of local artisans in markets within Bhutan and internationally. The HAB organizes trainings and seminars to enhance the skills of indigenous craftspeople and provides resources to support local artisans within their communities at the grassroots level, while opening avenues and providing exposure for them in core tourist hubs.

In doing so, HAB helps both rural and urban artisans produce superior handmade crafts while creating a network that encourages sustainable production while improving market accessibility and better prices for their goods.

There are 1,700 artisans registered with HAB and 195 locally affiliated stores and outlets, which display and trade over 100 different varieties of traditionally handmade crafts.

Executive Board



Chairperson
(Mr. Norbu Wangdi)



Board Member
(Mrs. Tshering Dem
Ongdi)



Board Member
(Mrs. Pema Yangchen)



Board Member
(Mrs. Kencho Wangmo)



Board Member
(Mr. Tshering Dorji)



Board Member
(Mrs. Deki)



Board Member
(Mr. Ten Dorji)



**Member Secretary
Executive Director**
(Mr. Chorten Dorji)

**Product
Development**

**Project
Management**

**Marketing
and Promotion**

**Accounts
& Administration**

Our Services

To increase the diversity and enhance the competitiveness of authentic Bhutanese handicrafts in a constantly changing market, HAB provides various support services across the handicraft value chain such as raw-material suppliers, artisans, retailers and consumers. Education and awareness is also an important activity organized by HAB.



Trade
facilitation



International
trade fairs and
exhibitions



Artisan
support



Education &
awareness

Handicrafts Map



Ongoing Projects

01

Sustainable Hospitality Industry Inclusive of Native Entrepreneurs (SHINE)

EU Switch Asia/GrAT Centre for Appropriate Technology

02

Community-based Sustainable Bamboo Enterprise Development (CBS-BED)

GEF/SGP UNDP Bhutan

03

Linking Rural Artisan & Handicrafts to Tourism Market (LHATRM)

EU/HELVETAS Bhutan

04

Creating Alternative Livelihood Opportunities for Rural Poor - Drumdhen Weaving Project

EIF-DoT, MOEA, RGoB

Financial Overview



TOTAL EXPENDITURE
24.48m (91.36%)



PROJECT EXPENSES
24.484m (70.18%)



OVERHEAD EXPENSES
5.675m (21.18%)



CASH IN BANK
2.31m (9.16%)



TOTAL RECEIVABLE
1.50m (5.59%)



During the past four years, HAB has raised a total of Nu 26.8 million from sources within and outside Bhutan. Of this, Nu 24.48 million has been spent in carrying out various activities outlined in the project documents. These projects benefited a total of 1,601 individuals across the country.

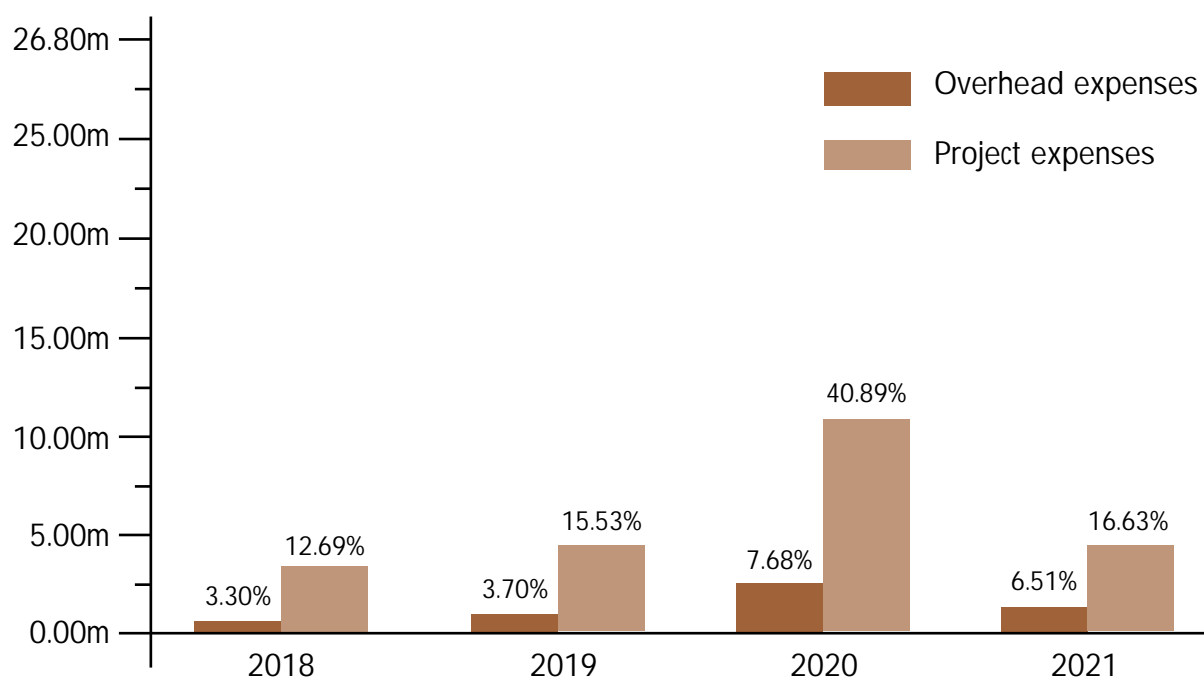


TOTAL FUND UTILIZED
26.80m

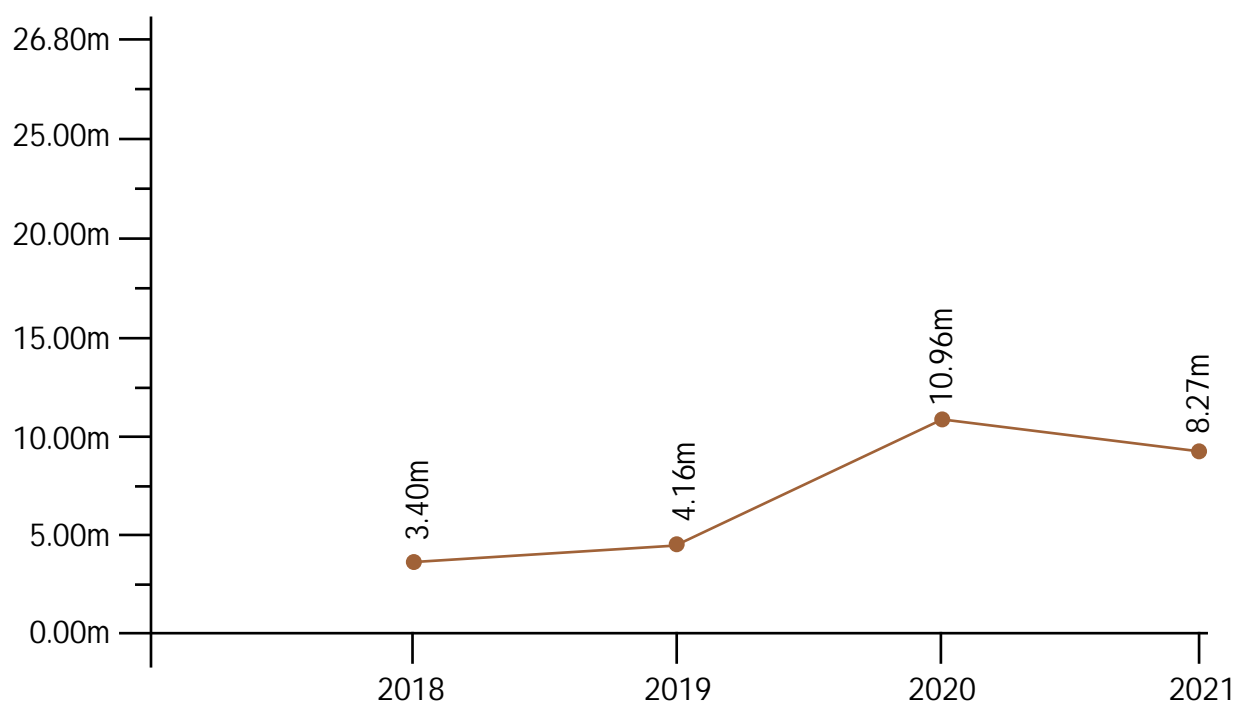
Sources of Income

SOURCE	AMOUNT
SGP-GEF/UNDP Bhutan	3,465,959.65
ADB/Ernst & Young India	4,887,339.43
EIF/DOT, MOEA, RGoB	2,000,000.00
EU/Helvetas Bhutan	3,168,081.00
Canada fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI)	3,168,081.00
Tourism Council of Bhutan (RGoB)	6,235,872.00
EU-Switch Asia/GrAT Centre for Appropriate Technology, Austria (SHINE)	3,595,156.67
Product Sales	188,535.66
Membership Fee/Donation	11,700.00
TOTAL	26,800,434.99

Year-wise Expenditure



Year-wise Income



HAB's fund mobilization and expenditure have steadily increased in the last four years. In 2020, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, HAB received Nu 10.96 million from various funding sources.

From the overall fund raised, more than 70% was spent in direct project activities with just over Nu 5.6 million spent as overhead project costs.

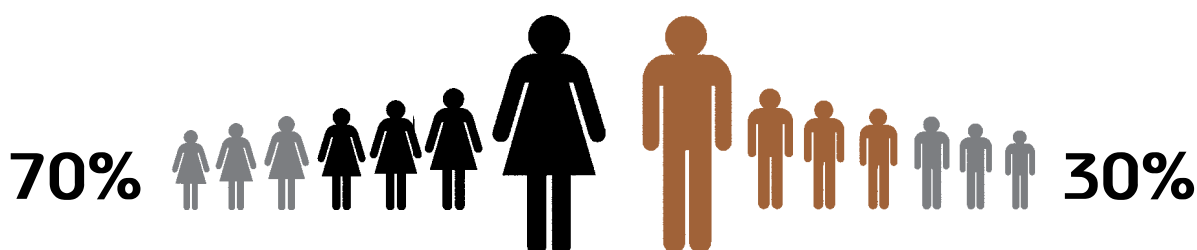
As of September 2021, HAB had spent Nu 8.25 million, excluding projects that are in the pipeline.



Beneficiaries

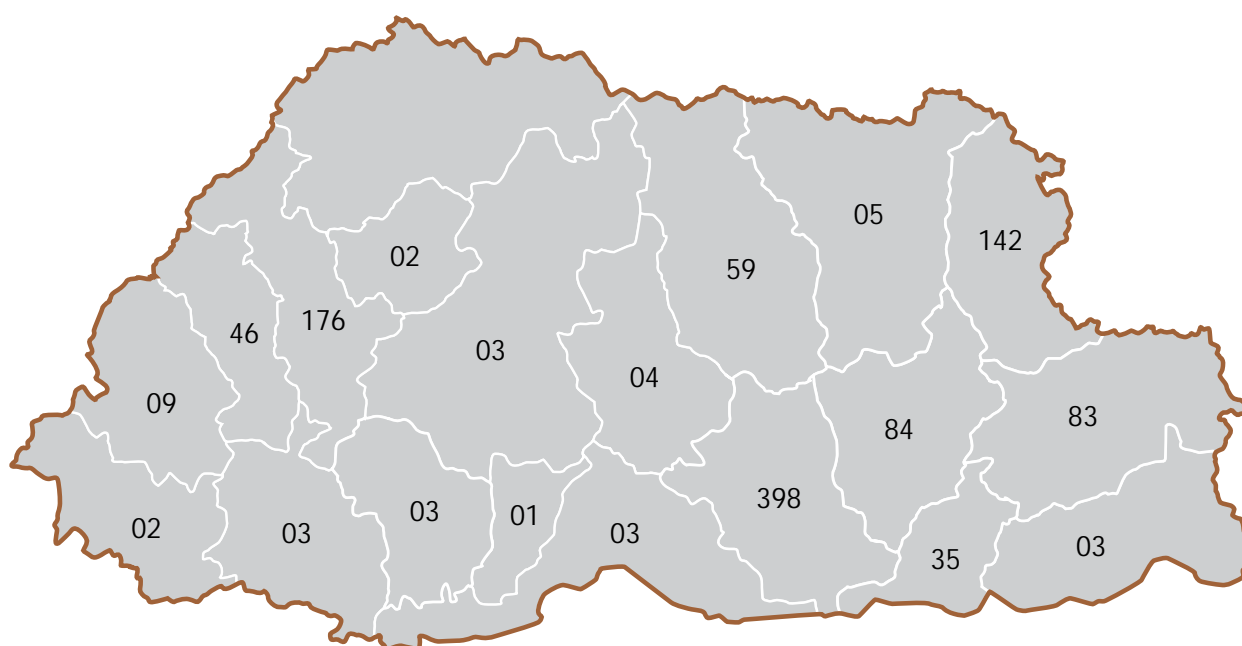


Total Members
1,700



Total Beneficeries: 1,061 (63%)

Nationwide Distribution of Beneficiaries



Interventions



Export Facilitation
24



Capacity Building
584



Product Development
239



Promotion
350

Individuals trained and supported in the past four years



Export Facilitation

To explore overseas export markets and enable knowledge transfer, HAB sent 11 craft vendors to attend international expos in China. Similarly, 10 were sent to India, three to Taiwan and one to Uzbekistan.



Capacity Building

To enhance domestic productivity, diversity, quality and business skills, HAB trained 584 craftspeople in tailoring, weaving, carpentry, souvenir making, photography, product pricing, business planning and promotion.

Product Development

To imbibe innovation and creativity in the handicraft sector, HAB trained 239 craftspeople in design thinking skills, quality benchmarking, raw material assessment and sourcing, and market assessment and research.



Promotion

To provide a direct market access to the under-privileged rural craftspeople, an e-commerce portal with 350 value-added products was established besides developing a handicrafts catalogue for greater product visibility.

Drumdhen weaving

An initiative is underway in the village of Chenkar Zam, Phangkhar Gewog, Zhemgang, to create alternative livelihood opportunities.

The weaving project benefiting 18 poor, landless households has been initiated by HAB with funding from the Enhanced Integrated Framework of the Department of Trade, Ministry of Economic Affairs, and Zhemgang Dzongkhag Administration.

Project Highlights



SHINE

The four-year project "Sustainable Hospitality Industries Inclusive of Native Entrepreneur (SHINE)", funded under the SWITCH-Asia Programme, was initiated by Centre for Appropriate Technology (GrAT) and kicked off in May 2020 in the seven target districts of Trashigang, Trashiyangtse, Pemagatshel, Lhuntse, Mongar, Zhemgang and Dagana.

To contribute to sustainable and inclusive tourism development in Bhutan with an improved regional spread of tourism activities and its value, SHINE adopts the two-way strategy: to vitalize tourism where the handicraft and

agro-products are made, and conversely, to bring these products to where tourism is. The project engages native producers - individuals and groups in the tourism value chain, links their products and services to the tourism hubs, and uses Appropriate Technology (AT) to increase production quality and quantity.

The beneficiary groups are rural producers, craftsmen, hoteliers, village home-stays, agro-producers, craft and agro-enterprises, women entrepreneurs, informal self-help groups, disadvantaged youth, etc.

LHATRM

To link the rural artisans & handicrafts to the tourism markets, HAB carried out a project funded by EU/ Helvetas to provide holistic solutions through policy interventions, and strengthening value chain and linkages.

The project activities included improving coordination among the agencies, increased uptake of indigenous handicrafts into tourism market, and improving diversity and quality of handicrafts. The project benefited 150 vendors, grassroots producers, and craftspeople from Haa, Trashiyangtse, Lhuentse and Zhemgang.

CBS-BED

In 2018, HAB initiated the project titled “Innovative community-based sustainable bamboo enterprise development to reduce pressure on forest resources in Lower Zhemgang” to create sustainable high value based economic opportunities with efficient use of bamboo resources.

The project, funded by SGP/GEF UNDP-Bhutan, has initiated community-based production of flag poles, scaffolding, furniture, etc., using bamboo as raw material.

The project benefits 18 youth groups comprising 180 artisans/workers through the supply chain.



Product Development

HAB initiated a training on textile-based handcraft designing and product development funded by the Tourism Council of Bhutan and SHINE. The training was aimed at reducing the import of handicrafts from neighboring countries post Covid-19 pandemic through re-skilling of craftspeople in handcraft design, product development, and marketing.

The project activities included conducting training, initiating training needs assessment, developing training modules, providing support to establish businesses, creating market access and developing an e-commerce platform and a handicrafts catalogue.

The project was implemented in three phases: the first two phases with 60 participants in Punakha and the third in Zhemgang with 32 participants. The participants comprised individuals who were economically impacted by Covid-19.



Product Highlights



About 90% of the products in the Bhutanese craft sector is imported from neighbouring countries like Nepal, India and Bangladesh. This is because, among other reasons, there is a shortage of sufficient authentic Bhutanese products in the market, a lack of product diversification and innovation, and poor visibility and value chain linkages.

For example, our craftspeople are still using equipments that are as old as 300 to 400 years old.

To overcome these challenges, HAB has introduced a range of interventions such as tools and knowhow for product diversification, enhancement of value chain, and market linkages both within and outside Bhutan. HAB is also creating platforms for knowledge transfer and introduction of appropriate technology in partnership with international agencies such as GrAT Centre for Appropriate Technology in Austria besides facilitating access to credit and quality raw material.

In the past year alone, HAB has developed and launched 239 new and innovative products.











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