

# Decentralisation and CBNRM in Bhutan

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## **The decentralisation process**

The local administrative structure in Bhutan consists of 20 districts (*Dzongkhags*), which are subdivided into 201 blocks (*Geogs*). After several decades of central-level government building, a decentralisation and devolution process was initiated with the establishment of Districts Development Committees (Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogchung – DYT) in 1981, followed by the Geog Development Committees (Geog Yargay Tshogchung - GYT) in 1991. The 2002 National Assembly adopted new amended DYT and GYT Acts, which assigned further responsibility to the Dzongkhag and Geog Development Committees, including the planning and implementation of the Ninth Five-year Plan (2002-7). It was further decided to have direct election of the geog chairpersons (gups); with the first election held in August-September 2002. Furthermore, the chairperson of the District Development Committee is now elected by its members, meaning that the head is no longer automatically the District Commissioner (Dasho Dzongdag), but more likely to be one of the Gups. With these decisions, the geogs have gained considerable political, administrative and financial authority over local development. At the geog level, the development plans, budget, reporting, use of local taxes and other authority have now been vested with the gup and the Geog Development Committee (GYT). With the increasing capacity in the Dzongkhags and with the further specification of routines and procedures, many tasks and responsibilities are expected to be transferred from the ministries and other central institutions to the local level. These recent changes have created a need for clarification of procedures, organisation and mandate - a process that is likely to occupy most of the Ninth Five Year Plan.

## **Outstanding issues related to CBNRM and decentralisation in Bhutan**

The decentralisation and devolution process in Bhutan provide much scope for promoting and operationalising CBNRM. However, many issues need to be addressed politically, technically, legislatively and administratively if the potentials for CBNRM are to be attained. Some pertinent questions are listed below for further discussion.

- Customary rights are recognised both legally and administratively, but these rights may be detrimental to productivity, equitability and sustainability. Somebody's customary right are in many cases somebody else's lack of right. Should customary rights be reviewed and possibly annulled in case of un-sustainability, inequity or unproductive use of the resource?
- The involved government institutions are more likely to 'reinvent' and 'design' CBNRM initiatives rather than facilitating existing activities carried out by

communities. How can we promote a greater awareness of, sensitivity to, and acceptance of community-initiated management practices?

- Community coherence and organization are low by regional standards and local leadership and entrepreneurship remain weak in most places. Can we through the CBNRM framework improve this situation and, if so, how should this be done?
- The ongoing decentralisation and devolution process provide considerable opportunity for CBNRM. However, clarification is needed on the roles, mandates, responsibilities, and relationships between community organisations and the government system. What are the most pertinent issues to be clarified in order to facilitate and speed-up the CBNRM process?
- The legal recognition of and possibilities to form NGOs need to be formalised and encouraged. However, what prevents the formation and involvement of NGOs at the present stage, and should something be done about it?
- The prospect of using payment for environmental services or plough-back mechanisms from forestry, tourism and hydropower revenue remain unexplored, but may be a highly feasible way to create local revenue. Does PES fit the CBNRM concept and would there be a realistic way to go about this in Bhutan?
- How can Ministry of Agriculture promote better collaboration and sharing with in Ministry on the issue of CBNRM?
- The extension provided by the line-departments focuses on the individual production systems and has difficulties in dealing with integrated and cross cutting issues. How can we ensure that MoA can assist communities in managing for instance land use planning, watershed management, cooperatives, and eco-tourism?
- Models and experiences are needed on community management of natural resources – preferably by taking locally applicable approaches. How do we ensure an experimental, analytical and open-minded approach to the model and experience building?
- Government-led land-use and watershed management planning are likely to be introduced in the near future. Would it not be natural to apply such planning and regulatory tools in the context of CBNRM, and if so, how should we go about promoting this concept?
- Considering that the average rural geog consists of only 200 households, would the Geog Development Committee be a feasible unit for CBNRM, rather than forming user groups based on the management of a single resource?
- Within the next 2-3 years, the Land Act and the Forest and Nature Conservation Act will be revised and a Grazing Act will be drafted. How best to ensure that CBNRM will be considered and feasible regulations instigated?
- The scourge of CBNRM schemes is the risk of elite-capture, mismanagement and exclusion of legitimate stakeholders. What are the possibilities of addressing these problems through local administrative structure?