

Bhutan

I. What was achieved?

- Bhutan embraces environmental mainstreaming

How was it achieved?

- Bhutan, which stands out for its efforts to preserve and conserve the environment, is now taking the step forward to integrate environmental considerations into its sector development plans.
- Efforts to mainstream environmental issues in national and sector development plans were initiated in May 2007 under a joint UNDP-UNEP initiative. The support initially targeted three line agencies in the preparation of policy guidelines and organising a series of workshops to create awareness and engage key government officials in broad-based dialogue on the concepts of mainstreaming environment. Concurrently, AusAid supported a capacity building programme to complement the UNDP-UNEP initiative through targeted training of a team of officers from line agencies on mainstreaming concepts.
- These initiatives have had a significant impact on the way environment is perceived by development planners in Bhutan. This approach to maximise both sustainable utilization and conservation of natural resources is particularly important for Bhutan as the country is encountering growing challenges of balancing development and livelihood opportunities against the need to conserve the environment.
- The Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC), Bhutan's apex planning agency has embraced the task of ensuring the integration of environmental considerations into all sector development plans. GNHC is the key implementing agency of the follow on Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI) programme which commenced in July 2008. Building on the outputs of the previous projects, GNHC aims to incorporate in the Planning Manual, a requirement that sector development plans must take into consideration poverty-environment concerns, as a condition for inclusion in future national development plans. A senior GNHC officer noted that, "It has been unfortunate that environment has been seen as a sector issue in Bhutan so far. But it is no longer treated that way."
- Bhutan today has the distinction of being the first country in the world with specific constitutional obligation on its people to preserve the environment. Article 5 of Bhutan's Constitution emphasizes the responsibility of all Bhutanese to protect the environment, conserve its rich biodiversity and prevent ecological degradation. It also stipulates that a minimum of sixty percent of the total land area must always be maintained under forest cover for all time to come. This forward looking and far sighted constitutional pledge is intended to ensure the long term sustainable use of natural resources in a manner that not only benefits present and future Bhutanese generations but also contributes in a small measure to global environment health.

