



Building resilient food systems in Bhutan

National priorities for the food and agriculture sector

In Bhutan, 60 percent of the population are engaged in agriculture, but the country imports 50 percent of its total food requirements. There are several challenges within Bhutan's food systems, which became pronounced with the COVID-19 pandemic. To build a high-performing and resilient food systems in Bhutan, the Government has identified eight transformative pathways, a joint result of the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021. The pathways will ensure a resilient food systems that assures access to affordable, safe and nutritious food for all, double smallholder farmers' incomes, empower women and reduce drudgery.

Context

The key challenges in Bhutan's food systems include rural-to-urban migration, human-wildlife conflict, poor water management, limited agro-enterprises, inadequate marketing systems, and limited access to credit and subsidies. Only 2.6 percent of Bhutan's land is arable and agricultural production costs are high. The country is also highly vulnerable to natural hazards and increased climate variabilities. Employment in agriculture is mainly for small-scale subsistence farming with low productivity, often with limited processing and value addition.

Under the country strategic plan (CSP) 2024-2028, WFP focuses on capacity strengthening to support the Government's efforts to deliver equitable and

inclusive economic growth and advance human capital development. Key support areas include resilient food systems, integration of nutrition into social protection programmes like school feeding, and emergency preparedness and response.

Resilient Food System and Agriculture value chain approach

Using a resilient food system and a demand-led agriculture value chain approach, WFP aims to support Bhutan's national pathways for food systems development in key areas to expand investments and capacities in resilient food systems, integrating nutrition considerations into social protection programmes such as school feeding, and strengthening systems for emergency preparedness and response. WFP will strengthen and support Government efforts to deliver equitable and inclusive economic growth and



advance human capital development. WFP will support rural populations in Bhutan, particularly women smallholder farmers, young people, and persons with disabilities, to achieve climate-resilient livelihoods and increased food security and nutrition by 2030. This will be achieved by:

- 1) Supporting farmer-based organizations, especially ones led by women and youths, through skills development to increase the resilience of smallholder food production to the climate emergency, natural hazards, and other risks.
- 2) Supporting small-scale agro-enterprises and other value chain actors with skills development to add value to local products and sustainably access smallholder agriculture markets.

Building resilient commercial smallholder agriculture project (BRECSA)

Through the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP)-funded BRECSA project, WFP will support the Government to transform smallholder agriculture in four districts into inclusive and resilient agri-food systems that are profitable, and food and nutrition secure. WFP aims to support a 30 percent increase in commercial agriculture production in four districts of Zhemgang, Trongsa, Tsirang, and Sarpang. The project targets 12,074 smallholder farmer households of which 60 percent will be women and 30 percent, youth.

The project is structured around three interconnected components of resilient production systems, strengthened value chain coordination and market linkages, and an innovative and competitive agri-food sector.

As a new strategic approach, WFP will carry out the *consolidated livelihood exercise for analysing resilience* (CLEAR) exercise which will help to map out the impacts of climate change and their anticipated impacts on women and men smallholder farmers and rural communities. Based on the exercise agriculture resilience plans will be developed for all 37 *gewogs* (sub-district divisions) under the four districts. The resilience plans will identify specific climate-resilient infrastructure and crop varieties, planning of cropping zones, and suitable post-harvest management.

An innovative index-based micro-insurance programme is being developed with WFP assisting the Government under an Adaptation Fund proposal. Adaptation Fund microinsurance offers food-insecure farmers who are exposed to recurrent shocks the opportunity to manage their climate-related shocks. The project will help make the livelihoods of 10,000 smallholder farmers more climate resilient.

Farm-to-school and local market linkages

WFP assists the Government in promoting market-led production and strengthening the capacity of 9,000 smallholder farmers to produce nutritious food for schools under the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme, and local markets.

WFP provides post-harvest and marketing assistance and supports the capacity enhancement of government staff in agriculture value chains and marketing.

WFP assisted the National Statistical Bureau and the Department of Agriculture in setting up an agriculture monitoring and reporting system in the Bhutan Statistical Database System, which provides access to quality data and supports the Government, farmers, and stakeholders in effective decision making.

Building a future

Globally, governments have widely recognized that investing in smallholder farmers is key to unlocking the agricultural potential of their countries, reducing poverty, promoting inclusive growth, and empowering women, among other advancements. Similarly, in Bhutan, the Government prioritizes investments in smallholder farmers. WFP will enable the Government to provide smallholder farmers with gender-transformative support for improving the production, aggregation, transformation, and marketing of nutritious food. This integrated approach will advance the Government's efforts to promote nutrition-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection and will complement the broader efforts of the Rome-based agencies in agriculture.

