



Waking the Watchdog: needs, challenges and opportunities of environmental advocacy in modern Bhutan

Hilary Oliva Faxon
Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies



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Context





Jeffrey Sachs

Director, Earth Institute of Columbia
University; Author, 'The Price of
Civilization'

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Happy Happiness Day!

Posted: 03/20/2013 11:45 am



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GNH

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Let me be the first to wish you a very Happy Happiness Day! In case you didn't know it, today is the first [International Day of Happiness](#), launched by all 193 UN member states. Happiness Day doesn't mean we've arrived at happiness, but it does mean that we've recognized that happiness is our goal -- and that our societies need to work harder to promote the things that really matter in the 21st century.

The fourth king of the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan led the way 40 years ago, drawing on ancient Buddhist wisdom. Bhutan should pursue Gross National Happiness (GNH) rather than Gross National Product (GNP) like the rest of the world. Since then, Bhutan has been experimenting with a new holistic approach to development that emphasizes not just economic growth but also culture, mental health, compassion, and community. Bhutan is searching for a balanced society.

Table A4. Emerging Market and Developing Economies: Real GDP ¹
(Annual percent change)

	Average	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Projections		
	1994–2003									2012	2013	2017
Central and Eastern Europe ²	3.4	7.3	5.9	6.4	5.4	3.2	-3.6	4.6	5.3	2.0	2.6	3.8
Albania	6.3	5.7	5.8	5.4	5.9	7.5	3.3	3.5	3.0	0.5	1.7	2.5
Bosnia and Herzegovina	...	6.3	3.9	6.0	6.1	5.6	-2.9	0.7	1.3	0.0	1.0	4.0
Bulgaria	0.6	6.7	6.4	6.5	6.4	6.2	-5.5	0.4	1.7	1.0	1.5	4.5
Croatia	4.3	4.1	4.3	4.9	5.1	2.1	-6.9	-1.4	0.0	-1.1	1.0	2.5
Hungary	3.2	4.8	4.0	3.9	0.1	0.9	-6.8	1.3	1.7	-1.0	0.8	1.8
Kosovo	...	2.6	3.8	3.4	6.3	6.9	2.9	3.9	5.0	3.8	4.1	4.6
Latvia	4.8	8.9	10.1	11.2	9.6	-3.3	-17.7	-0.3	5.5	4.5	3.5	4.0
Lithuania	...	7.4	7.8	7.8	9.8	2.9	-14.8	1.4	5.9	2.7	3.0	3.6
FYR Macedonia	1.1	4.6	4.4	5.0	6.1	5.0	-0.9	2.9	3.1	1.0	2.0	4.0
Montenegro	...	4.4	4.2	8.6	10.7	6.9	-5.7	2.5	2.4	0.2	1.5	2.2
Poland	4.5	5.3	3.6	6.2	6.8	5.1	1.6	3.9	4.3	2.4	2.1	3.6
Romania	2.1	8.5	4.2	7.9	6.3	7.3	-6.6	-1.6	2.5	0.9	2.5	3.5
Serbia	...	9.3	5.4	3.6	5.4	3.8	-3.5	1.0	1.6	-0.5	2.0	2.0
Turkey	2.7	9.4	8.4	6.9	4.7	0.7	-4.8	9.2	8.5	3.0	3.5	4.4
Commonwealth of Independent States ^{2,3}	0.6	8.2	6.7	8.8	9.0	5.4	-6.4	4.8	4.9	4.0	4.1	4.1
Russia	0.7	7.2	6.4	8.2	8.5	5.2	-7.8	4.3	4.3	3.7	3.8	3.8
Excluding Russia	0.3	10.8	7.6	10.5	10.0	5.6	-3.1	6.0	6.2	4.7	4.8	4.9
Armenia	7.5	10.5	14.1	13.2	13.7	6.9	-14.1	2.1	4.6	3.9	4.0	4.0
Azerbaijan	2.2	10.2	26.4	34.5	25.0	10.8	9.3	5.0	0.1	3.9	2.7	3.1
Belarus	2.3	11.4	9.4	10.0	8.6	10.2	0.2	7.7	5.3	4.3	3.4	4.1
Georgia	...	5.9	9.6	9.4	12.3	2.3	-3.8	6.3	7.0	6.5	5.5	5.5
Kazakhstan	2.1	9.6	9.7	10.7	8.9	3.2	1.2	7.3	7.5	5.5	5.7	6.3
Kyrgyz Republic	1.1	7.0	-0.2	3.1	8.5	7.6	2.9	-0.5	5.7	1.0	8.5	5.0
Moldova	-3.1	7.4	7.5	4.8	3.0	7.8	-6.0	7.1	6.4	3.0	5.0	5.3
Mongolia	3.7	10.6	7.3	8.6	10.2	8.9	-1.3	6.4	17.5	12.7	15.7	9.7
Tajikistan	0.5	10.6	6.7	7.0	7.8	7.9	3.9	6.5	7.4	6.8	6.0	6.0
Turkmenistan	4.3	14.7	13.0	11.0	11.1	14.7	6.1	9.2	14.7	8.0	7.7	8.0
Ukraine	-2.3	12.1	2.7	7.3	7.9	2.3	-14.8	4.1	5.2	3.0	3.5	3.5
Uzbekistan	2.5	7.4	7.0	7.5	9.5	9.0	8.1	8.5	8.3	7.4	6.5	5.5
Developing Asia	7.0	8.5	9.5	10.3	11.4	7.9	7.0	9.5	7.8	6.7	7.2	7.7
Afghanistan	...	1.1	11.2	5.6	13.7	3.6	21.0	8.4	5.8	5.2	6.5	4.2
Bangladesh	5.1	6.1	6.3	6.5	6.3	6.0	5.0	6.4	6.5	6.1	6.1	7.3
Bhutan	6.8	5.9	7.1	6.8	17.9	4.7	6.7	11.8	5.3	9.9	13.5	10.7
Brunei Darussalam	2.4	0.5	0.4	4.4	0.2	-1.9	-1.8	2.6	2.2	2.7	1.5	3.6
Cambodia	7.4	10.3	13.3	10.8	10.2	6.7	0.1	6.1	7.1	6.5	6.7	7.7
China	9.4	10.1	11.3	12.7	14.2	9.6	9.2	10.4	9.2	7.8	8.2	8.5
Fiji	2.7	5.5	2.5	1.9	-0.9	1.4	-1.3	-0.2	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.1

Results




Figure 2: Selected Pro-Advocacy Quotations and their Characterizations

Number of respondents	Characterization of response	Example quotations
7	Use of “watchdog”	<p><i>“RSPN is a watchdog, watching the activities of the government and if there are any critical issues they should bring them to the notice of the people”</i></p> <p><i>“As the only local environmental organization, it has a voice, it can be a watchdog to many government plans and programs, it can be the opposition leader of the environmental front and movement.”</i></p>
6	Use of “advocacy” / “advocate”	<p><i>“With the new democratic government, as an NGO there is a really important role advocating environmental issues, and trying to bring in environmental issues to the policymakers”</i></p>
3	Repeated or central theme of advocacy	<p><i>“For an NGO, what I think, action is the first thing.”</i></p> <p><i>“Moving forward we need a more active voice for civil society, RSPN would be one of them”</i></p> <p><i>“RSPN can continue to grow and become increasingly effective especially in protecting the environment by promoting effective laws and helping to ensure that the laws are implemented and obeyed”</i></p>

Modern History of Conservation

- Local community natural resource management
- 1969: Forest Act of Bhutan
- 1970s, 80s: Environmental Conservation as 1 of 4 pillars of GNH
- 1980s: Dasho Benji and the Black-necked Cranes
- 1987: Royal Society for Protection of Nature
- 1991: Bhutan Trust Fund for Environment Conservation
- 1992: National Environment Commission
- 1995: Forest and Nature Conservation Act
- 1998: The Middle Path: National Environmental Strategy
- 2000: Environmental Assessment Act
- 2007: National Environmental Protection Act
- 2008: Constitutional Commitment to 60% forest cover in perpetuity
- 2011: >50% of the country designated Protected Area



“ Our nation will soon face a question that others already confront: whether we can maintain a development path that allows us to meet pressing current needs without compromising the prospects of future generations. This is the challenge of sustainable development: to raise the material well-being of all our citizens and to meet their spiritual aspirations, without impoverishing our children and grandchildren... we recognize the potential of new technology and industries, but... no amount of technology or monetary assets can make up for a razed forest, depleted soils, polluted waters or ravaged climate.”

- Paro Resolution on Environment and Sustainable Development, 1991

Challenges

- Road & hydropower development
- Urbanization
- Climate change
- Tradition of consensus
- Democracy!

Opportunities

- Democracy!
- Example: Community Forestry
- Other actors?
 - Within RGoB
 - NGOs
 - Media

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What Do the 6 Whimsical Dog?



What Breed of Watchdog?

- Research, application, iteration
- Mediating: government, people, environment
- Woof?!

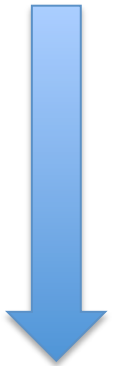
Environmental Governance: Challenges & Opportunities

Unique

Shared

Challenges

- “culture of consensus”
- Specific natural resource, landscape traits (hydropower, mountains, GLOFs)
- Traditional values and culture
- Carbon sink
- GNH



Opportunities

- Rise of construction, infrastructure
- EIAs
- Food security
- Cross-sector communication
- Human resource capacity
- Rural-urban migration
- Increased consumption
- Local-level implementation and ownership
- People in National Parks
- Climate change vulnerability
- Donor-driven projects
- Public advocacy
- Sustainable tourism
- Community forestry models

Questions & Conclusions

- Necessary perspective shift: eco-Shangri-la -> (distinctive) participant with lessons to teach/learn
- Diversity + radical shifts demand adaptive strategy, which includes environmental advocacy
- Exploring cases (mega dams, community forestry, public advocacy, alternative development metrics & policies) for applicability

Kadrinche

A landscape photograph showing a range of mountains with snow-capped peaks. The sky is a clear, deep blue. The word "Kadrinche" is written in a large, black, sans-serif font in the center of the image. A thin, light-colored horizontal line is visible in the sky, just above the mountains.