In this Issue:

1. From the Field
2. Resources during COVID-19
3. From the BCF Blog
4. BCF Think Piece
5. GNH Corner
6. Recommended Viewing
1. From the Field

The rapid global spread of COVID-19 has had significant impacts on international development NGOs, including the Bhutan Canada Foundation. We have suspended our education programming for the short term as much of it involves sending Canadian and other volunteers to Bhutan. International travel restrictions and the COVID-19 situation in Canada currently make carrying out this type of programming not possible. In this context, we’ve put increased focus on writing and curating a range of written and online education resources. Some of these you will find in this newsletter. We continue to monitor the global COVID-19 situation as we look to the future when we can re-start our education work.

Despite the suspension of education programming, BCF is fortunate to be able to continue its in-country work on the Trans Bhutan Trail (TBT). This exciting initiative involves BCF and its Bhutanese partners redeveloping a culturally and historically important national walking trail that crosses Bhutan from East to West. While our staff in Bhutan practice social distancing measures, important work continues on the TBT. In mid-March, two expedition teams undertook a survey and initial clearing of the trail. One team started in Haa and the other in Trashigang, with the two tired but excited teams meeting up in Trongsa. For an update on the expedition and the TBT initiative more generally, please click here.

The COVID-19 situation in Bhutan itself provides some hope as countries around the globe grapple with the spread of the virus. The Royal Government of Bhutan has taken a number of significant steps to contain the coronavirus. As of April 20, only six cases of COVID-19 have been identified in the country. All of them were identified in incoming arrivals to Bhutan on flights from other countries. Bhutan’s aggressive approach to early identification and quarantining has meant 5 of the 6 cases have recovered or are nearly recovered, with no evidence yet of community spread within the country. As the global community continues to move towards a still unclear future, the case of Bhutan’s response to COVID-19 may be a useful one for identifying lessons learned to be applied to a potential second wave of the pandemic.
2. Resources during COVID-19

COVID-19 Information for Bhutanese nationals in Canada

Bhutanese nationals are advised to check the most recent updates from government and health agencies including:

- Ministry of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB)
- Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, RGoB
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, RGoB
- Public service delivery in Bhutan in the wake of COVID-19
- COVID-19 Outbreak Update, Government of Canada, (GoC)
- Removing Barriers for International Students Working in Essential Services, GoC
- World Health Organization COVID-19 Quick Links
- Johns Hopkins University COVID-19 Dashboard

The Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations in New York has requested Bhutanese nationals in Canada to register with them to receive announcements. They have also set up a 24/7 helpline to offer support to Bhutanese nationals. Individuals can contact bhutanmission@pmbny.bt or call +1(929)-471-4167 or +1(347)-204-0891 to access the helpline.

Educational resources during COVID-19 school closures

With school closures, many teachers, students, parents, and guardians are navigating remote learning for the first time. To support the education of youth, Bhutan Canada Foundation has put together a collection of free resources to help facilitate student learning, encourage the emotional wellbeing of youth, and provide information during school closures. This collection includes Bhutanese, Canadian, and other content. See resources here
3. From the BCF Blog

Staff Spotlight: Karma Tshering, Field Director

Karma Tshering joined Bhutan Canada Foundation when it first open its doors in 2009. He has an extensive career working in development in Bhutan, which to date spans over 30 years. Keep reading this staff spotlight to learn more about Karma!

Can you describe what you do at BCF? I work on everything! For programs this includes all of the logistics for placements, orientation, interactions with all stakeholders, and field visits. I facilitate meetings with our partner the Ministry of Education, as well as the Ministry... (continue reading)

Remembering Ambassador James George

James George, 1918-2020. Bhutan lost one of its greatest friends, and Canada one of its most eminent diplomats, with the death this month of Ambassador Jim George at the age of 101.

Jim George was a legendary figure in the Canadian Foreign Service: Rhodes Scholar, and World War II veteran, he joined External Affairs in 1955 and soon made a name for Canada in the most challenging and adventurous postings, including Sri Lanka and Iran. He was known for epic safaris, packing wife, children, and various junior staff into a jeep and heading off for territories where no Canadian... (continue reading)
Broadly speaking, education, in itself, is a path towards a progressive human life. The Buddha viewed education as a path to human enlightenment, or liberation from repeated suffering. Thomas Jefferson, one of America’s eminent presidents, stated that education is central to creating an “enlightened citizenry... for the proper functioning of a republic.” This implies that well-educated citizens are a prerequisite to smooth governance of the country. This is why Jefferson argued that it is important for the country to provide “a suitable education for all citizens.” This is also true for Bhutan. In contrast, the concept of politics refers to the governance of citizens, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, and the way scarce resources are utilised. Under the broad umbrella of politics, education becomes inseparable from government. Political scientists and educationists argue that... (continue reading)
5. GNH Corner

Gross National Happiness in Bhutan

Bhutan carries out a national survey every five years to collect Gross National Happiness (GNH) data from households across the country. This data is then used to evaluate existing government policies and design new policies to promote the nine domains of GNH: psychological wellbeing, health, time use, education, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standard.

6. Recommended Viewing

Hear Principal Sonam Chhogyel speak about the Educating for Gross National Happiness initiative and the value of wellbeing and happiness in this grounding interview. Watch video

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