

The Annual Nomads' Festival

“Celebrating the Richness of Mountain Nature & Culture”

Summary Report



Organized by the Ministry of Agriculture

Funded by WWF Bhutan & EU-SLS

Report & Photographs by Kimberlee Adolph



Introduction

The Annual Nomads' Festival was held in Nagsephel, Bumthang in Wangchuck Centennial Park on December 26th-28th 2009. Organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and funded by WWF Bhutan and EU-SLS, the event set out to bring together nomadic cultures from across the highlands of Bhutan to showcase their traditions, wares, and ways of life. Approximately ninety nomads from eight different dzongkhags were present including Haa, Paro, Thimphu, Gasa, Wangduephodrang, Bumthang, Trashigang, and Trashigang.

The festival proved to be a venue for competitions, performances of cultural dances, exposure to nomadic ways of life, and an opportunity for all to learn from one another. The different nomad groups took turns in meeting with the Chief Guest, singing, and participating in games like traditional wrestling, khuru, and archery. Members of the media were on hand for the event including Bhutanese newspapers, television shows, and a documentary team from the BBC.



Honorable Lyonpo (Dr.) Pema Gyamtsho, Minister, Ministry of Agriculture served as the Chief Guest and was accompanied by many Members of Parliament as he made his way to each of the stalls on the opening morning.

While no admission was charged for visitors to the Nomads' Festival, at the entry ribbons and badges were available for a small donation. Volunteers were also around the grounds pinning ribbons on tourists and collecting donations. This strategy alone raised Nu. 18,250. Coupons were also given to invited guests to spend in the food stalls and were later exchanged for monetary notes. The total amount processed in this manner was Nu. 58,000.

Preparation of the festival site also proved to be a monetary and vocational gain for the local communities. Regional heads from all districts were able to provide support in the planning and the construction of the site and the villages in Nagsephel conducted all labor. Collaborators included individuals from the Department of Livestock, Department of Forest, Dzongkhag Administration, Renewable Natural Resources Research Center (RNRRC), Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environment (UWICE), Hotel Association of Bumthang, Wangchuck Centennial Park, Center for Machinery Unit (CMU), and the National Brown-Swiss Breeding Center.

Objectives

At the inception of this project three main objectives were presented to keep the focus on the nomadic cultures and the real reasons for creating this type of event. The Ministry of Agriculture was determined to have these objectives be an integral part in the development, production, planning, and assessment of the project. Throughout the duration of activities it is clear each of the criteria was met to the best of abilities.

The first objective took into the account the impact the Nomads' Festival may have on a national level. By planning this event in late December there is the potential to draw tourists into Bhutan during what is currently the off-season. This will in turn

filter down to the local economies by helping stimulate monetary flows during the colder times of the year. It can also add to the diversity of experiences available to foreigner's traveling in the region. The hope was that "this will help Bhutan compete successfully with other destinations across the globe".¹ Another benefit having tourists also interested in visiting in the winter is the dispersion of tourists so there is not such an overflow during the peak season. This will help increase the quality of visits for foreigners as well as though working in the tourism industry.

While the success of this objective is more subjective than empirical, it seemed to have been a draw for tourists during its first installment. Guests included those from Japan, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and the United States of America. The hope is that those who visited will help increase the awareness of the Nomads' Festival in future years by word of mouth and dispersion of their own experiences. Increased advertising and awareness for the tourism council will also help drive more visitors to Bumthang in the off-season. The true evaluation of this goal will only be determinable over the next few years when the requests for information about the Festival and the amount of tourists increase or decrease. Wangchuck Centennial Park management has reported a visitor count of 1,400 people over the course of three days.

Part two of the objective's for the Nomads' Festival was directly related to the first in the hopes that an introduction of tourists and their monetary gains would trickle down to the local level. By providing a venue for the highland nomads to display and sell their wares, the opportunity to supplement their income is great. Products ranged from livestock items such as woven blankets, bags, and belts to yak milk and cheese. Jewelry was also a popular item as it is iconic of each nomad group and the diversity is so rich.



The economic impact of the festival for the local communities was also high. Villages surrounding festival site were able to participate in housing tourists as guests for home stays. The initial cost of the stays was Nu. 500 per national person and Nu. 1700 per foreign visitors. All of the home stays were occupied for at least one evening during the festival, though most maintained their visitors for the weekend. A side project with the Wangchuck Centennial Park management, the Hotelier's Association and the Tourism Council helped train twelve local women in proper guesthouse management. The course was completed in three months and each graduate was presented with a certificate by Lyonpo (Dr.) Pema Gyamtsho during the opening ceremonies. Other local venues that benefit from the additional tourist activities are the tour companies, hoteliers, and restaurants.

The third and final objective was met by simply providing a venue for the groups to showcase their heritage. Exhibiting the nomadic heritage also allows one to take stock of the social and economic climate in each of the respective areas. This type of survey

¹ "Nomad Festival to begin in Bumthang this Saturday 26th December 2009". Ministry of Agriculture. www.moa.gov.bt

would take much longer to complete if a census was to be taken in the home ranges of the nomad groups. By bringing them all together in one platform, it enables an accurate of socio-economic stability, as well as comparisons. It provides a forum for the sharing of ideas and innovations between cultures that make be experiencing similar obstacles, but would otherwise never meet. Showcasing the traditions and



culture also helps to make the nomadic culture more attractive to its younger generations, increasing the stability of the core values and helping to insure this way to life is not lost with the passage of time.

Stalls for each nomad group were provided and shelving or display materials were also available. This directly enabled a professional place for a variety of nomadic products to be exhibited. Items available for viewing and purchase included handbags, blankets, and belts made from yak hair, dried and fermented varieties of yak cheeses, bamboo bowls, and jewelry made from both metals and yak hair. The creation of this event directly provided an avenue to “bring together all the highland farmers of different backgrounds for sharing of their culture, tradition and experiences”.²

Activities of festival



All three days of the Nomads’ Festival were filled with activities. The cultural performances made up the bulk of the program and ran throughout the weekend. Adults and children made mask dances, songs, chants, and tributes from all the nomadic groups that were represented.

Twenty-five stalls were constructed as part of the construction for the festival site. The eight dzongkhags represented each maintained their own space and the others were used for informational groups, sales counters, and educational displays. Other groups with stalls included the Women’s Association of Bumthang, Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority (BAFRA), Organic Farmers,

Animal Health for Human Wealth, Department of Livestock, Department of Forest, and Renewable Natural Resources (RNR). *

Competitions and games proved to be the biggest draw for local participants and the nomads. Traditional wrestling, weight lifting, pillow fights, archery, and khuru were big



² “Nomad Festival to begin in Bumthang this Saturday 26th December 2009”.

Ministry of Agriculture. www.moa.gov.bt

* See appendix for full list (1.1)

draws for those interested in sporting events. Livestock competitions were also held and awards were given out for the best examples of yak bulls, heifers, cows, and calves. Other activities included a dog show, yak lassoing, a calf weight guess, and horse or yak riding.*

Suggestions for future festivals

The largest obstacle for the Nomads' Festival appeared to be the location and the lack of easy access roads. The majority of the negative remarks made by tourists and visitors were the condition of the main road from Chokhar. The improvement of this facility would greatly benefit the festival. While some were concerned with the physical location of the site, keeping it located in Bumthang offers more positive influences than negative. Bringing people to this part of the country opens up other tourism opportunities and gives a more natural setting for the nomads.

Keeping the festival within the boundaries of Wangchuck Centennial Park also aids in furthering the conservation goals for the area. Most of the national parks have a festival during the year and this helps those in the community take pride in the park. Conservation will only work with the help of the people living in the area and providing a venue where revenue can be generated is crucial in furthering the objectives of conservation. If the people see the environment as a natural resource to be conserved, goals for preservation will be much more readily met.

One of the identified parts of the third objective was to allow the nomads to meet with one another and intermingle in a way that normally would not be to happen. While this venue was provided, creating activities that put the different groups in direct contact with one another would be helpful. There was not a lot of self-produced interaction between the nomad groups and this fact was not lost on them, as one newspaper article quoted.³

Conclusion

In initial concept and planning the Nomads' Festival Committee set out very large goals for the program. While an effort was made to achieve all these objectives, a few fell short, but the overall sight for the festival was successful. Nomads were brought together for the first time to showcase their way of life for others, including foreigners, to see. This concept is not something that can be deemed a failure or a success by only one installment. Only the future occurrences of the Nomads' Festival will truly be able to give an accurate reading on the ultimate success of such a venture.

At the time of this writing, it is believed that future happenings would be met with assistance and encouragement from many avenues. Once the aforementioned complications are resolved, there should be no obstacles for the future of the Nomads' Festival. In conclusion, the first festival set lofty goals and most of these were met, making the overall conclusion a success for the first attempt of an event of this kind in Bhutan.

* See appendix for full listing (1.2)

³ Dema, Chenchho. "Nomadic Festival Disappoints the Nomads." Bhutan Today. December 28th, 2009.

Appendix

1.1

Complete List of Stalls and Exhibitions

1. Livestock Museum
2. Paro Dzongkhag Stall
3. Haa Dzongkhag Stall
4. Bumthang Dzongkhag Stall
5. Trashigang Dzongkhag Stall
6. Trashigang Dzongkhag Stall
7. Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag Stall
8. Gasa Dzongkhag Stall
9. Thimphu Dzongkhag Stall
10. Livestock Diversity and Development of Alpine Livestock
11. Alpine Feed and Fodder Resource Development (NFFDP)
12. Methods for Processing Yak Wool
13. Animal Health for Human Wealth
14. Protected Areas of Bhutan and Their Ecological Functions (CFO)
15. Post Harvest Technology on Cordyceps (AMS)
16. Organic Farming in Bumthang (DAO)
17. Food and Hygiene (BAFRA)
18. Multi-Sectoral Task Forces – Dzongkhag Health
19. High Altitude Medicinal Plants
20. Women's Association of Bumthang
21. Deadly, Poisonous and Cultivated Mushrooms in Bhutan

1.2

Daily Program

December 26th, 2009

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| 0830 hrs | Arrival of Guests |
| 0900 hrs | Reception of Chief Guest with Chipdrel to the festival ground |
| 0915 hrs | Marchang Ceremony |
| 0930 hrs | Welcome Address by Director, DoF |
| 0940 hrs. | Welcome Address by DASHO DZONGDAG, Bumthang |
| 0955 hrs | Welcome and short address by Hon'ble Minister, MoA |
| 1010 hrs | Keynote address by the Chief Guest |
| 1025 hrs | Vote of thanks by CFO, WCP |
| 1035 hrs | Suja Desi |
| 1100 hrs | Opening of the Nomadic Festival by the Chief Guest and visit to all exhibitions and stalls including Yak Show and Dog (Jobchhi) Show |
| 1145 hrs | Cultural program by Students of Zhabjithang CPS, Nomadic groups, Dzongkhag Dancer, Local Drayang, Musk dance, community group |
| 1145 hrs | Yak riding and horse riding program will start simultaneously based on the interest of the participants |
| 1200 hrs | Awarding of Certificates to the graduates on Basic Farmhouse/Hotel Management training by Honorable Chief Guest |
| 1230 hrs | Lunch Break |
| 1300 hrs | Yak Tsham, Cultural program and Mask dances |

1330 hrs	Yak bull lassoing and Yak calf weight guessing
1430 hrs	Shoksum
1530 hrs	Traditional Wrestling
1630 hrs	Awarding of prizes to the winners of for Yak show, Wrestlers, Yak calf weight guessers, yak bull lassoing
1645 hrs	Cultural program by Chokhor community
1700 hrs	Cultural program will continue by different groups
1800 hrs	Live show on RNR and will be organized by ICS
1900 hrs	Official Dinner for all Guests
2000 hrs	Live show on RNR and will be organized by ICS will continue
2030 hrs	Close for the Day

December 27th, 2009

0800 hrs	Breakfast will be available in the stalls and home stays
0845 hrs	Gathering of all the participants and ready for the day
0900 hrs	All exhibitions and stalls will continue
0900 hrs	Cultural programs - Musk dance and Yakcham program and stalls to be continued
0900 hrs	Horse riding program will continue whole day based on interest of the participants
1000 hrs	Degor program will start
1100 hrs	Pillow fight program will start
1130 hrs	Tea will be served (Cultural program will continue)
1200 hrs	Lunch break
1300 hrs	Khuru program will start
1330 hrs	Weight carrying competition will start
1330 hrs	Cultural program by Nomadic groups
1430 hrs	Cultural program by local drayangs
1530 hrs	Cultural program by Dzongkhag dancer
1600 hrs	Awarding of prizes to the winners of the day's events
1630 hrs	Cultural program will continue by different groups
1800 hrs	Live show on RNR and will be organized by ICS
1900 hrs	Break for the dinner
2000 hrs	Live show on RNR and will be organized by ICS will continue
2030hrs	Close for the Day

December 28th, 2009

0800 hrs	Breakfast will be available in the stalls and home stays
0845 hrs	Gathering of all the participants and ready for the day
0900 hrs	All exhibitions and stalls will continue
0900 hrs	Horse riding will continue
0930 hrs	Archery in traditional bow will start
1000 hrs	Quiz competition on Livestock and on Bio-diversity/protected Areas of Bhutan between Nomadic groups
1030 hrs	Tug of War between guests and nomads
1200 hrs	Lunch break
1300 hrs	Awarding of prizes to the winners of the day's event
1345 hrs	Vote of thanks by the Chairperson –DYT Bumthang Dzongkhag/Gup Chhokor Geog

1400 hrs Tashi Lebey
1430 hrs Closing of the Festival

1.3 List of Nomads' Festival Steering Committee Members

Sangay Thinley – Dzongkhag Administration
Karma Tobden – Hotel Association of Bumthang
Sanga – Gup, Chorkhor
Nawang Norbu – UWICE
Dorji Wangchuck – RNRRC (Jakar)
Jambay Wangdi – Jakar
Penjor – CMU
Kinga – Bumthang Division
Wangchuck – Dzongkhag Administration (Finance)
Sangay Wangchuck – Dzongkhag Administration (Culture)
Tenzin – Wangchuck Centennial Park
DS Rai – Wangchuck Centennial Park