

Environment & Youth

Background

With the vision of “Environmentally conscious youth who work in the spirit of collaboration towards sustainable and conducive environment in line with GNH values.” The environment and youth group would like to express our views and perspectives of the current realities on the environmental issues. Bhutan being one of the top ten biodiversity hotspot and the pride of our nation it is very essential that we need to give more importance to the environment. So, conservation and preservation of pristine environment should not be confined with youth being aware of it but it should be broad and taken into action.

With developmental activities taking place, it is not only the responsibility of the concerned authorities but also the young people to take pivotal role in shaping the society at a higher level. They can change their lifestyle and how it affects the environment. They can make their homes, schools and youth organization more environmentally friendly practices, recycling of different waste materials as well as preserving resources.

The youths taking part and engaging in environmental protection not only impacts their behaviours but also influence their parents, relatives, agencies and nation as a whole. Protection of the environment starts with pollution control. It is the youth who can contribute to making difference in the society with practicalities.

The National Youth Policy was endorsed by the Government in 2011. But with the changing time, there is a need for improvement in shaping the existing issues and policy statements to make it realistic. Our group basically focused on Environment inline with Youth.

We the group genuinely want to contribute a few realistic issues and recommendations in making the National Youth Policy more strong and effective. In the environment and youth section, it only talks about the youth to be aware about the environment knowing the fact that Bhutan’s top most priority is the conservation of the environment where it consists of cross cutting sections like economy, health and wellbeing, socio-culture, education and learning. In the National Youth Policy 2011 policy background there is exclusion on generation of waste, increase in the consumption pattern, mindset and lifestyle, rural-urban migration, planning and attention to the quality of infrastructures, coordination and building capacity.

There are three core issues that can be seen realistic and applicable in this context;

1. Increase in the production of wastes

Bhutan is at a developing stage with so many positive impacts. However, just as a coin has two sides, there are negative consequences as well. There are a number of causes contributing to waste production. Firstly, there is no proper place for segregation and disposal of waste as the existing dumping area is not enough due to increase in the population especially in the urban areas. There are a total of 735,553 populations where Thimphu itself has a population of 138,736 with 2076 km (PHCB, 2017) that have straining impacts on the society.

According to Annual Environment Report 2017, the waste collected within Thimphu district increased to 25,367 metric ton in 2016 compared to 17,246.25 in 2011 metric ton which indicates how much waste generated.

Secondly, there is an increase in the consumption pattern as most of the people like and consume foreign goods and services which could be foreign culture influence. Thirdly, it is rural-urban migration. 48,214 people migrated to Thimphu from various districts with different notion like better facilities, better job opportunities and better life. Another cause is inconsistencies in using paper in the digitized world as it is still seen that job application and presentation in schools are doing with paper that contributes to generation of waste.

2. Rampant consumerism

With the modern era there is rapid growth in consuming goods and services as people's need has changed into want based. People move from rural areas to urban centres with a hope of getting a job or having a good living but one cannot deny the fact that when population increases in one area there is over use of resources and on the other hand the resources are left fallow in the neglected area. The overconsumption in urban areas not only declines resources but also leads to increase in wastes which degrades the land and increases the problem of segregation and disposal of wastes.

3. Environmentally Unconscious Mentality

The forest coverage of our country is 70% and we are known for being carbon neutral but because of this people have the mindset that we are safe and need not worry about the future. They are not aware of the carbon off setting where our neighbouring country India's carbon produced are being absorbed by our forest and for that although we are being compensated, the investment of that money is being invested in other fields like economic, agriculture, industrial development and very less money is being used for environmental purposes. The other cause is about pick-and-throw games which depicts the poor mentality of people. There are lots of young volunteers in Bhutan who form groups of different kinds and serve the country cleaning it very well. However other people have the mentality that they can throw waste anywhere they like and the young people will clean after them. The lifecycle of it will continue and people's mindset will remain the same.

4. Poor Infrastructure Development

Planning in terms of everything is always a must as everything is concerned with the environment. However we see a lack of interaction and coordination between agencies. When different stakeholders meet up for the planning their discussion cannot come to concrete conclusion whereby whatever they plan fails at the end. Like lack of eco-friendly approach towards infrastructure developmental development, here e.g. when there is construction of any infrastructures contractors from various parts gather to bid, and the contractor who bids for the lowest budget gets the contract.

So, it is often said that our country is not so developed and we cannot afford to build better quality infrastructures but these infrastructures last for 3-4 years and again the same amount and sometimes even more expenditure is used in reconstructing it. This leads to negative impacts such as the uneven use of resources, production of more construction wastes causing air pollution and health issues. This poor planning of infrastructure is related to the environment as when planning is not done well there is high chances of environmental deterioration and land fragmentation creating imbalance in the ecosystem.

Recommendation on existing National Policy

1. To educate environmental friendly entrepreneurial mindset and skills development.

Regarding environmental education the government has introduced environmental science which is really a positive response but it is just confined with studying theory so our group has come up with the idea of making the study practical and broaden the knowledge regarding environment. When it comes to skills development and entrepreneurial mindset there are many agencies like Greener Ways (deals with wastes), Clean Bhutan (deals with creation of awareness) and Loden Foundation (deals with training of young entrepreneur) so with this agencies supporting the youth and with environmental knowledge they can set up their own business and make profits out of waste.

2. Proper evaluation and monitoring on the policy by the relevant stakeholders.

When it comes to policy it is well drafted but lack in monitoring makes the policy useless. E.g. Plastic ban policy in Bhutan- before in 1999 the policy came into formulation but they could not continue it and again after 20 years that was last year 1st April 2019 it came into action but due to lack in monitoring it didn't go well and people are using plastics openly. So before implementing a policy, relevant stakeholders must come up with a strong solution to deeply uproot the cause and problem.

3. Conduct Sustainable environment programmes.

When it comes to sustainable environment programmes our group's notion is to make Bhutan a clean and green country and for that we have come up with the idea of conducting cleanest Dzongkhag competition twice a year where the Dzongkhag who maintains cleanliness will be awarded and well recognized. While doing this the people will also get inspired and do their best to keep their Dzongkhag clean and as a whole the whole country becomes clean.

4. To give importance on the regularity of using digital services.

In this 21st century we are neglecting the digital era and sticking to paper and chart works which leads to an increase in waste. The age old tradition of using papers for any work cannot be stopped completely as many are still struggling with technology but it can be still be minimized. Youth today are experts in the use of technology so it will be an easy task for them to adopt these changes. E.g. letting the students do PowerPoint presentation, making the job applications online services and all.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, environment is a multidisciplinary subject and it should be given more importance like others. Environment is ours and we the youth have to take a vital role for its conservation and preservation as this is our generation and we have to keep it safe and sound. In the NYP that was endorsed in 2011 it just consists of being aware and creating awareness but it should be broadened because only educating and awareness will not bring us to any solutions but acting firm and strongly upon them will. Our group has come up with various problems like waste, consumption, and poor planning. And to these problems we also have come up with some productive solutions so as to make our country ever clean and green.

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