

Local Conservation Support Group

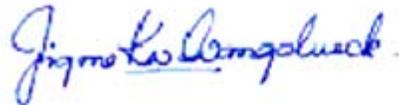


Strategy Document

Local Conservation Support Group Strategy Document

17/06/99

“The kingdom of Bhutan is blessed with an exceptional and largely intact natural environment. I have joined RSPN in its mission to raise awareness of the challenge that faces us now. We must all accept our individual responsibility to conserve the rich diversity of Bhutan’s plant and animal species, for the benefit of both the natural world and our children’s future.”



His Royal Highness DASHO JIGME KHE SAR NAMGYAL WANGCHUCK
the Crown Prince of Bhutan, Royal Patron of RSPN

RSPN’s mission is

To inspire personal responsibility and actively involve the people of Bhutan in the conservation of the Kingdom’s environment through education, applied research and information dissemination in collaboration with concerned agencies and indigenous institutions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 About RSPN

The Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) is the first and the only non-governmental organization (NGO) in Bhutan to exclusively concern itself with the conservation of Bhutan's environment. RSPN's efforts in environmental conservation and its achievement has been appreciated and duly recognized both by the Government of Bhutan and outside agencies. RSPN functions as a conservation partner to the government and shares environmental concerns. RSPN also contributes in the attainment of one of the pillars of "Goss National Happiness" - the Environment Conservation

RSPN's mission is –

To inspire personal responsibility and actively involve the people of Bhutan in the conservation of the Kingdom's environment through education, applied research and information dissemination, and collaboration with concerned agencies and indigenous institutions.

RSPN's goals for 2005 to 2010 are

- Conserve endangered species outside the protected area system
- Develop ecosystem-based approaches to management in areas outside protected areas system
- Support management of emerging urban environmental issues
- Enhance institutional capacity for environmental education, ecological research, and community-based natural resource management

1.2 Rationale of LCSG

To accomplish RSPN's mission of inspiring personal responsibility and actively involve the people of

Bhutan in the conservation of the Kingdom's environment, RSPN initiated a membership program. RSPN has both national and foreign members. Besides, a network of nature clubs all across the country actively participates in the conservation endeavour.

Concerned of the increasing threats being compounded by trends in global environmental issues (climate change and global warming) and rapid developmental activities taking place, establishment of Local Conservation Support Group (LCSG) at the grassroots will provide a platform for the local communities to raise their concerns and voice out to address environmental issues in their locality. Examples of the kind of conservation actions that could be taken by LCSG include promotion of traditional land-use and natural resource use practises among local communities, facilitation of conservation agreements between local communities and protected area managers, and informed advocacy with local decision makers to mitigate threats arising from development projects. In addition, the LCSGs can contribute to local development planning and environmental management processes in their dzongkhag. LCSGs can also feed information to RSPN, which can be used at the national level to prepare awareness materials or advocate for changes to national plan and policies.

1.3 Purpose of the strategy

This strategy has been prepared by the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN). The purpose of the strategy is to guide the establishment and continual development (in terms of coverage, membership and capacity) of a nationwide network of Local Conservation Support Groups (LCSGs). LCSGs comprise groups of grassroots stakeholders who work together to address locally identified environmental issues, in support of the mission and strategic goals of RSPN. LCSGs broaden RSPN's membership at local levels, and assist the organisation to deliver on its commitment to inspire personal responsibility and actively involve the people of Bhutan in the conservation of the Kingdom's environment.

The strategy will be used by RSPN to:

- (i) ensure consistency in the way that the LCSG concept is applied across the Kingdom;
- (ii) identify priorities for individual and institutional capacity development in order for RSPN to support the LCSG network most effectively;
- (iii) assist in fundraising efforts to sustainably finance the LCSG network.
- (iv) Guide the smooth implementation of LCSG programme in the Dzongkhags.

1.4 Process to develop the strategy

The strategy has been developed as an activity of the project – “*Building Grassroots Civil Society Support for Biodiversity Conservation in Bhutan*”, collaboration between RSPN and BirdLife International, with financial support from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) facilitated by World Wildlife Fund (WWF). A preliminary draft of the strategy was prepared during a strategy formulation workshop conducted in Thimphu on 25 and 26 October 2007. This was an internal workshop among RSPN staff, facilitated by Jack Tordoff of BirdLife International. The draft strategy was then revised, to incorporate feedback from external stakeholders, and adopted for the pilot phase of the LCSG programme.

Two years later, reflecting to the lessons learned from the field, the strategy was revised in August 2009. LCSGs members from six dzongkhag shared their experiences from the field to facilitate the revision.

2. MISSION & GOALS OF LCSG PROGRAM

2.1 Mission

By 2020, RSPN's network of Local Conservation Support Groups (LCSGs) established in all 20 dzongkhags in Bhutan. The LCSGs will be active, effective, and credible and will be making a significant contribution to the attainment of RSPN's mission goals.

2.2 Aim

To address priority conservation issues in at least 6 dzongkhags during the pilot phase through effective and continuous monitoring of the environment

- Through effective and continuous monitoring of species
- understanding the value of conservation
- enhanced conservation activities
- Addressing emerging environmental issues
- Ensure sustainable natural resources management

2.3 Guiding Principles for LCSG

- Respect Tsa-Wa-Sum
- Recognize and draw strengths from Bhutanese Culture
- Transparency
- Be totally committed to Conservation goals
- Be accountable and transparent
- Be flexible and responsive to the public's environmental concerns

2.4 Objectives

- 1) To inspire and enhance active local participation in conservation, through establishment of effective LCSGs in at least 6 dzongkhags.
- 2) To empower LCSGs through networking measures that facilitates exchange of skills, experience and information.
- 3) To strengthen the capacity of LCSG members for effective management of LCSG programs
- 4) To advocate/educate local people of the emerging environmental issues
- 5) To advocate/educate local people on the sustainable use of resources
- 6) To establish a systematic mechanism for monitoring of the environment based on the local issues identified
- 7) To establish a systematic mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of programs.

2.5 Indicators

- 1.1 By 2010, each LCSG has at least 5 members who regularly take part in meetings and activities.
- 1.2 By 2010, each LCSG implements at least 3 conservation-related activities each year.
- 1.3 By 2010, each LCSG generates at least 1 conservation message per year.

- 2.1 By 2010, at least one environmental issue identified by the LCSG network (if any) is discussed at

- meetings in the Dzongkhag and in RSPN.
- 2.2 By 2010, all 6 LCSGs are represented at a National Network Meeting annually.
 - 2.3 By 2010, the activities of LCSGs are featured at least once in broadcast media (TV, radio) and one in print media (Kuensel, BO, BT) per year.
 - 2.4 By 2010, all LCSG members and other relevant audiences receive bilingual newsletter sharing information and lessons learned.
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- 3.1 By 2010, all LCSGs have received relevant capacity building trainings.
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- 4.1 By 2010, local people are able to identify emerging local environmental issues
 - 4.2 By 2010, local people are able to voice out issues and take initiatives pertaining to their locality
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- 5.1 By 2010, LCSGs implement at least one project which concerns sustainable utilization of natural resources
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- 6.1 By 2010, based on the identified issues, the LCSGs have developed an appropriate monitoring system
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- 7.1 By 2010, all LCSGs have institutionalised an effective monitoring and evaluation system

3. ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF LCSGs

3.1 Role

LCSGs are groups of individuals who are genuinely concerned for the environment and support conservation through local actions. They are environmental ambassadors (to their community) and watchdogs (of decision-makers). LCSGs promote sustainable livelihoods, and help communities voice and develop local solutions to local environmental issues.

3.2 Functions

In order to perform this role, LCSGs have the following functions:

- Identify local environmental issues through monitoring.
- Voice environmental issues of local concern (directly, via RSPN and/or via the media).
- Facilitate dialogue between grassroots and relevant stakeholders on environmental policies and issues.
- Monitor the status of biodiversity, threats to it and conservation actions taken in response.
- Act as a source of information (a 'databank') on environmental issues.
- Develop and implement activities that address local environmental issues.
- Pilot and promote alternative livelihoods that deliver conservation benefits.
- Be a role model that motivates and inspires other individuals and groups.

3.3 Geographical priorities

Within Bhutan there are many sites of significance from a conservation and/or wider environmental perspective, including: protected areas managed by the Royal Government of Bhutan; conservation areas managed by RSPN; habitat linkages within the Bhutan Biological Conservation Complex (B2C2); and rivers, streams and forests not under any formal conservation management. Some of these areas are recognised as global conservation priorities by international conservation organisations, including as Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). LCSGs cannot address environmental issues at all significant sites within their dzongkhags, especially in the first years following their establishment, when their capacity and confidence are still developing. It is necessary, therefore, for LCSGs to set geographical priorities for their activities, in order to complement existing conservation initiatives and align their work to RSPN's strategic goals.

To this end, LCSGs should be guided by the following consideration:

- 1) To avoid overlap with other LCSGs, they should work within their own dzongkhag.
- 2) Where possible, LCSGs should address RSPN priority areas found within their dzongkhag (i.e.

threatened species outside protected areas; conservation areas outside protected areas; and areas with significant urban waste and/or water quality issues).

- 3) However, LCSGs should also have the freedom to work in different places, according to where the most pressing issues are.

Geographical priorities can be established by means of a Conservation Needs Assessment, conducted by the LCSG with the support of RSPN (see below).

3.4 Priority issues

In the same way as for sites of conservation significance, there are likely to be more conservation issues in any given dzongkhag than an LCSG can effectively address. Therefore, it is necessary for LCSGs to determine which issues they will address through their actions, and to prioritise which actions they will take first.

Process for determining priority issues

- Step 1: With the support of RSPN, each LCSG will undertake a Conservation Needs Assessment to identify urgent conservation issues in their dzongkhag. Conservation Needs Assessments should be undertaken in a participatory manner, involving the wider community, in order to ensure that priority issues identified reflect local people's concerns.
- Step 2: Each LCSG will prepare a list of actions that they would like to take over a five-year period to address the priority conservation issues identified through the Conservation Needs Assessment.
- Step 3: With the assistance of RSPN, each LCSG will prioritise which actions to take first, using the criteria presented below.
- Step 4: Each LCSG will prepare annual work plans.

Criteria for prioritising actions

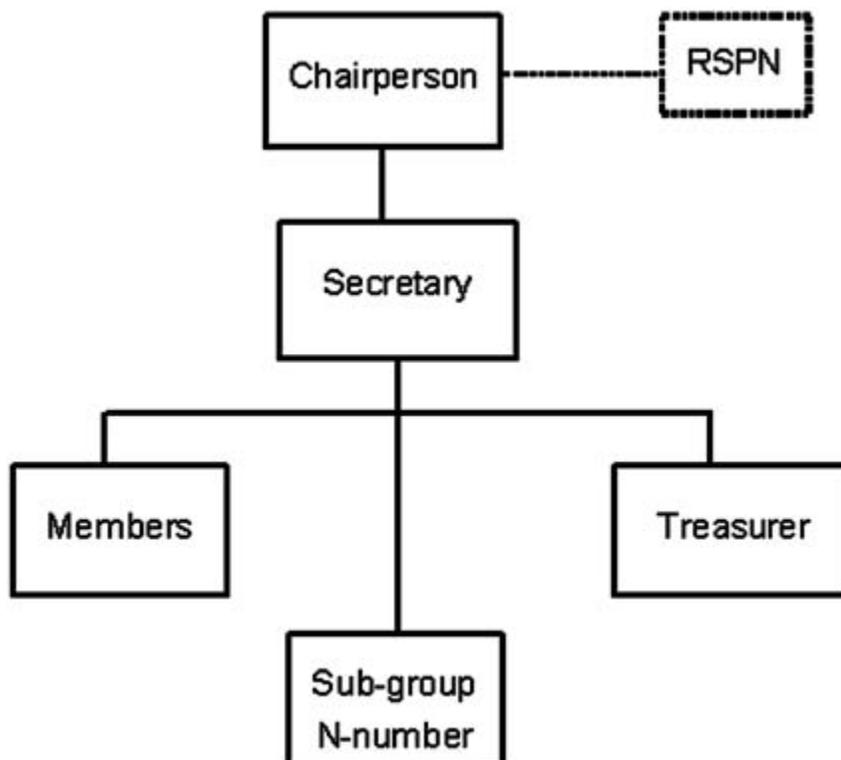
1. Sustainable.
2. Effective.
3. Deliverable given the LCSG's capacity.
4. Address urgent environmental issues.
5. Resource efficient (in terms of funds and technical expertise).
6. Benefit the wider community.
7. Conservation-related (address RSPN's strategic goals).
8. Deliver rapid results.

As a general rule, RSPN should encourage LCSGs to implement straightforward actions with achievable goals during the first years of their establishment, in order to build their capacity and confidence. Once their capacity has increased, LCSGs can then be encouraged to implement more ambitious actions that address more challenging conservation issues. Another important consideration is to encourage LCSGs to implement actions with high public visibility during the first years of their establishment, in order to raise their profile with key stakeholders and attract new members.

4. GOVERNANCE OF LCSGs

4.1 Organisational structure

The following organogram shows a *minimum* structure for an LCSG. Depending on the size of LCSG and the distribution of its members within a dzongkhag, it may be necessary to extend the membership at the geog levels forming a sub-group. A Dzongkhag can have any number of sub-group depending on the issues, number of geogs or municipality.



Chairperson

The Chairperson's main responsibilities will be to:

- Chair meetings.
- Facilitate decision making.
- Represent the group to external stakeholders.
- Provide overall leadership for group development and fundraising.
- Monitor the overall functioning of LCSG

Secretary

The Secretary's main responsibilities will be to:

- Perform day-to-day administrative functions (keeping a register of members, taking meeting minutes, etc.).
- Organise LCSG meetings and draft meeting agendas.
- Officiate in the Chairperson's absence.

- Initiate conservation activities.
- Act as the main channel for information to and from RSPN (monitoring results, reports, news stories, etc.).
- Accountable to the Chairman
- Shall appoint an active member as Officiating Secretary in his/her absence

Treasurer

The Treasurer's main responsibilities will be to:

- Perform day-to-day book keeping functions.
- Maintain an inventory of LCSG assets.
- Prepare financial reports.
- Develop budgets for funding proposals.
- Act as the focal point for auditors.

Members

The main responsibilities of the members will be to:

- Participate in meetings, planning and decision making.
- Help/Support in implementation of LCSG activities.
- Collect information about local environmental issues and share with the rest of the group.
- Help raise or contribute funds (cash or in kind) for the group's activities.
- Assist in monitoring and evaluation of activities

Technical support

Local government officials at the dzongkhag level possess technical expertise that could benefit LCSGs, particularly when they design and implement local conservation actions. The LCSGs can seek technical support from the Dzongkhag officials as and when required, even if they are not the members of the LCSG. The LCSGs can also avail assistance from RSPN and other relevant agencies for technical support

4.2 Governance structure

The governance arrangements for each LCSG should be defined in the LCSG guidelines. This document should be prepared and adopted by the LCSG membership, with guidance from RSPN. LCSGs should be allowed to formulate governance arrangements adopted to their own circumstances. LCSGs can encourage formation of subgroups within the Dzongkhag for expansion of membership and activities at the grassroots level.

However, unless extreme circumstances dictate otherwise, all LCSG guidelines should contain the following standard provisions: The following are the LCSG procedure norms:

Meetings

LCSGs should be able to decide where and how often they could meet. However, each group will be expected to hold at least two general meetings for the whole membership each year. They may decide to hold meetings more frequently than this, some of which may only involve some members, if appropriate.

Position holder and their tenure ship

Position holders (Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer) will be elected by the full membership of the LCSG. The position holders will hold their positions for 3 years, after which time there will be a new

election open to all members. The position holders will be allowed to stand for re-election if they wish. If in case the position holders did not perform as desired and not in accordance with their roles and responsibilities as spelled out in the strategy document, the members can call for a vote of no-confidence at any general meeting. If a vote of no-confidence is passed by a majority, it should lead to a fresh election.

RSPN will not provide any payments to LCSG position holders but if an LCSG wishes to provide their position holders (or other members) with an 'honorarium' (e.g. for serving as leaders, taking part in monitoring, etc.), they should be allowed to do so, subject to approval by the membership. Such payments would have to be made from funds raised by LCSGs themselves.

Membership

LCSG membership should be open to anyone, except candidates and sitting Members of Parliament because of the need for RSPN to retain its reputation as an apolitical organisation. Each member will fill the membership form that can be retained in the office by the secretary as a record.

Membership should be for 3 years. Renewal should be subject to members' interest. Members should pay a nominal annual membership fee, essentially to make the members feel their participation and also to raise little fund for LCSG activities. Each LCSG should determine the level its fee should be set at and the amount collected to be deposited in LCSG accounts.

Financial management

Each LCSG has to open its own bank account in the nearest bank. Financial transactions into and out of this bank account should require at least two signatures, one of which should be the Treasurer's. RSPN should provide each LCSG with a seed fund of Nu. 20,000 as soon as their bank accounts are opened, in order to cover initial running expenses.

LCSGs should prepare and submit to RSPN a regular financial report on half-yearly basis. The Treasurer should present an annual financial report to a general meeting of LCSG members. RSPN financial staff should perform regular internal auditing of LCSG accounts, to ensure that they comply with RSPN's external auditing requirements.

4.3 Ownership

In order to enhance ownership of LCSGs by their members, RSPN should pay attention to the following measures:

Cost sharing

Wherever possible, LCSG members should be encouraged to contribute to the costs of LCSG activities, especially in the case of livelihood activities, from which they may expect to get financial benefits. Members' contributions could be in the form of labour, materials or funds (e.g. through a membership fee or a share of the profits from livelihood activities).

Participatory planning and implementation

LCSG projects should be designed and implemented with the participation of as many members as practical. Where possible, participation in project design should be extended to members of the wider community, in order to increase transparency and accountability. RSPN should provide training for LCSGs in project cycle management and participatory project planning.

Recognition of LCSGs' work

RSPN can take a number of steps to acknowledge the contribution LCSGs make to conservation in Bhutan, and, thereby, boost motivation and ownership among their members. These steps include:

- (i) arranging media coverage of LCSG activities
- (ii) inviting LCSGs to National Network Meetings
- (iii) presenting certificates and/or awards to the best LCSG project(s) each year
- (iv) *LCSG members' recognition*: An active member will be awarded a certificate of appreciation/recognition (special awards such as cash, or other benefits could also be considered, based on the criteria laid below)
 - Served 3 years as member
 - Initiative/innovative/creativity
 - Dedicated
 - Leadership qualities

Motivation for LCSG members:

In order to keep LCSG members active and together so that there would be more interaction among the members, some recreational activities would be arranged depending on the time and schedules of the members. The following are the recommended activities for the members:

- Bird watching
- Hiking/Trekking
- Pilgrimage cum cleaning campaign
- Exchange visits with other LCSGs
- study tours

5. STATUS OF LCSGS

5.1 Office establishment

It is unlikely that any LCSG will have sufficient funding to hire office space for their use, and this is not something that RSPN should pay for, because of the issue of sustainability. Consequently, LCSGs will probably need to negotiate meeting rooms, and, if they require it, office space, free of charge. RNR centres or schools may be able to provide meeting rooms. If LCSGs require office equipment (such as desks, telephones, computers and printers), they may be able to acquire these in the form of donations from private businesses in their dzongkhag. Alternatively, RSPN may have surplus office equipment that it is able to donate to LCSGs. LCSGs can avail facilities from RSPN Branch offices in the region

5.2 Relationship between LCSGs and RSPN

Formal affiliation

Upon establishment, LCSG should sign a formal Affiliation Agreement with RSPN. RSPN will issue a certificate of affiliation to LCSG. However, before the signing of an agreement, RSPN will make sure the LCSG to agree upon the following criteria:

- LCSG function within the legal framework of RSPN
- LCSG share the mission and goals for RSPN
- LCSG established transparent financial management and reporting systems
- LCSG willing and able to raise its own resources to contribute to the cost of its activities

Delist of LCSG

In the event that LCSG do not follow the above criteria, RSPN has the right to delist its membership and withdraw the certificate of affiliation.

LCSGs that have become formally affiliated to RSPN should be free to leave the LCSG network at any stage, subject to a majority vote by their members. LCSGs leaving the network may wish to continue as community-based organisations or formally establish themselves as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) under the Civil Society Organisations Act. If a group left the LCSG network, the affiliation agreement with RSPN would be cancelled, and RSPN would be free to establish a new LCSG if it required.

External communications

Once a group has become formally affiliated to RSPN, RSPN will receive credit for any conservation successes the group has, and be able to point to the group as being part of RSPN's members at the grassroots level. The flip-side of these benefits is that RSPN's reputation is exposed to negative publicity in the event that LCSGs behave irresponsibly. In order to minimise RSPN's exposure to reputational risks of this kind, the following measures should be incorporated in the affiliation agreement with the LCSG:

- 1) Any advocacy message that the LCSG wishes to send to national level decision makers should be passed by RSPN first, in order to verify that the information is accurate.
- 2) LCSGs are free to raise any conservation issue with decision makers at the dzongkhag level or below. However, they should be encouraged to avoid confrontational language, and advised that RSPN is available to help them approach local decision makers if they require.
- 3) LCSG members are free to speak with any journalist or media outlet as an individual. However, if they wish to speak on behalf of their LCSG, they should pass the message through RSPN.

Representation on RSPN's board

In order to enhance RSPN's accountability to the LCSG network, facilitate two-way information exchange and engender a feeling of belonging to RSPN, one member of the RSPN board should be an LCSG representative. The LCSGs will choose an appropriate representative during their National Network Meeting. In order to enhance continuity and enable them to become familiar with the workings of the board, LCSG representative should remain on the board for the same length of time as the other board members.

5.3 Relationships between LCSGs and other organisations

LCSGs (particularly if they are successful) are likely to have opportunities to collaborate with and receive support from other organisations, including NGOs, government institutions, donor agencies and private businesses. While such relationships present numerous opportunities (not least access to financial resources and technical support), they also present risks (particularly in terms of diverting the focus of the group away from RSPN's strategic goals). In order to maximise these opportunities and minimise these risks, the Affiliation Agreement between RSPN and the LCSG should stipulate the following:

- 1) LCSGs are not permitted to enter into a formal affiliation with another organisation.
- 2) LCSGs are allowed to enter into a joint project/activity with another organisation, even if it is not conservation-related (e.g. health, rural development, etc.), provided that it does not compromise the group's conservation objectives.

- 3) LCSGs are allowed to receive grants directly from donor agencies and other NGOs, provided that this does not compromise the group's conservation objectives.
- 4) With regard to receiving corporate donations: LCSGs will be expected to follow RSPN's position on which companies they are willing to receive donations from (once this position has been formulated).

5.4 Branding of LCSGs

Branding of LCSGs is an important issue, because the profile of LCSGs (and the network as a whole) affects their ability to attract and retain members, raise funding, and advocate effectively on conservation issues. A common LCSG logo has to be designed and used by all LCSG. The LCSG logo alongside RSPN's logo can be used in the letterheads of LCSGs. However, in the event that a group left the LCSG network, it would no longer be permitted to use the RSPN logo.

6. SUPPORTING THE LCSG NETWORK

6.1 Coordination

The LCSG network will be coordinated by the Project Coordinator based at the head office in Thimphu and assisted by the field officer based at the field office in Bumthang.

Technical support for the LCSG network will be drawn from different units of RSPN (environmental education, communications, research etc.) according to the needs of specific LCSGs.

6.2 Capacity building

Capacity building for individual LCSGs will be tailored to their particular needs, which will be identified through periodic LCSG Capacity Assessments (see Section 7.2). However, there are expected to be a number of core capacity areas in which support will be required by all LCSGs. For some of these areas, standard training courses could be developed by RSPN, and either conducted individually or delivered to all LCSGs at once when they gather for their annual National Network Meeting.

Orientation in the LCSG approach

This training course should provide an introduction to the LCSG approach for all members. It should cover key aspects of the approach, including role and functions, governance arrangements, and external communications. It should present lessons learned by LCSG in other countries and (once they become established) other LCSGs in Bhutan. The training could be conducted by RSPN, ideally with input from the LCSG leaders who will have already been briefed in the LCSG approach. LCSGs should be provided with a training manual, which provides guidance on key aspects on LCSG governance and management.

Financial management training

If required, the Treasurer will be trained in financial management procedures either through an internship at the Thimphu office or in an in-country short course in one of the financial training institutions.

Project development training

Training in project cycle management will be provided to interested LCSG members, with a particular emphasis on participatory project planning and writing small grant proposals. The best way to deliver this training might be by means of a short, classroom-based course, followed by hands-on training to develop a real funding proposal.

Communication skills training

Training in communication skills will be provided to interested LCSG members, with a particular emphasis on developing press stories suitable for the national media, preparing advocacy materials to submit to decision makers, and developing environmental education messages for dissemination via the Nature Club network. The most convenient way to deliver this training might be during the annual National Network Meeting. This training could be conducted by RSPN's Communication Unit. In addition, it may be possible to draw on the expertise of journalists at Kuensel, who are currently implementing a CEPF-funded project focusing on conservation awareness raising through the media.

Field survey and monitoring training

Because monitoring the status of biodiversity, threats to it and conservation actions taken in response is one of the key functions of LCSGs, interested members will be trained in field survey and monitoring.

This training will introduce the site monitoring protocol that will be developed through the CEPF project, and cover such topics as design of monitoring programmes, systematic data collection, and analysis of monitoring results. The best way to deliver this training may be by means of a combination of classroom-based and hands-on, practical training. It is likely that follow-up, 'refresher' training will be required from most LCSGs, to ensure that monitoring data are being collected in a consistent manner across groups.

6.3 Network meetings

Every year, representatives of every LCSG will attend a National Network Meetings held at a suitable venue. Selected external participants should be invited to attend these meetings, including but not limited to: (i) decision makers from relevant government departments; (ii) representatives of donor agencies and other NGOs; (iii) local people from other dzongkhags who are interested in establishing LCSGs of their own; and (iv) Journalists/Media.

The National Network Meetings will have the following functions:

- Facilitate exchange of experience and lessons learned among LCSGs.
- Enable LCSGs to make contact with members of other groups, to facilitate future collaboration, exchange visits, etc.
- Discuss the future development of the LCSG network.
- Provide training to LCSGs to address capacity needs shared by multiple groups.
- Introduce the LCSG approach to prospective LCSG members from other dzongkhags.
- Disseminate information about conservation issues to decision makers.
- Generate positive media coverage for RSPN and the LCSG network.

6.4 Action granting mechanism

The CEPF project makes provision for the provision of 'action grants' to LCSGs to enable them to implement activities to address local conservation issues they have identified. Because the funds allocated for action grants in the project budget are limited, RSPN should try to leverage additional resources that it can direct to LCSGs through the action granting mechanism. The following parameters and criteria for the action granting mechanism assume that RSPN will be successful in leveraging significant additional resources.

Calls for proposals

RSPN invites action grant proposals from LCSG based on the environmental issues and the urgency of the issue. LCSGs can put up any number of proposals to RSPN at any point of time, as and when issues are identified. RSPN can collect the project proposals and depending on the funding availability, the proposals will be submitted to donor agencies.

Project duration

The project duration varies on the size of project and requirements of the donor. In case of short duration, the LCSGs should be allowed to apply for follow-on grants for subsequent years, subject to a positive evaluation of the previous year's project.

Maximum grant size

Although it is encouraged that LCSGs implement small scale action grant projects, however, depending on the nature of project and the issue the project tries to address, the size of the grant differs.

Eligible activities

All projects must address local environmental issues, and should fall into one or more of the following focal areas:

- Biodiversity/forest conservation (e.g. species monitoring).
- Climate change monitoring/adaptation.
- Soil/land management.
- Water management.
- Waste/pollution management.
- Conservation-related livelihood activities (i.e. improving access to natural resources, income-generating activities, etc.).
- Information gathering and dissemination (i.e. environmental education, advocacy, communication through the media, etc.).

Action Grant Selection Committee

All Project proposals received from LCSGs will be reviewed by an Action Grant Selection Committee using the screening methodology set by RSPN. The committee will have final decision-making power regarding the awarding of action grants. In order to enhance transparency and take advantage of expertise external to RSPN, the committee members will include representatives of RSPN, government and donor agencies. In addition, it may be necessary to co-opt additional members onto the committee, to meet with the requirements of any donor whose funds the action granting mechanism may be channelling.

7. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE LCSG NETWORK

7.1 Expansion of the network

For the first four years, the LCSG network will be supported by the CEPF project. After the end of this period, additional funding will need to be secured, in order to sustain and expand the network. The CEPF project will enable RSPN to pilot the LCSG approach and, thereby, refine the approach so that it is suitable to the local context. By the end of the project, RSPN should be in a strong position to expand the LCSG network to cover all 20 dzongkhags in Bhutan. This expansion should not happen immediately but gradually, in a phased way, to take advantage of lessons learned during the pilot phase and to allow for RSPN's limited capacity to establish and support new groups. A proposed timeline for the expansion of the LCSG network is outlined below:

Year	Expected progress
2008	Pilot LCSGs established in 3 dzongkhags: Bumthang; Trashigang; and Sarbang
2009	LCSGs established in 3 more dzongkhags: Punakha; Zhemgang and Lhuntse
2010	End of CEPF project. All 6 LCSGs are well established. New 4-year project funded to cover period 2010-2014.
2012	LCSGs established in 3 new dzongkhags.
2014	LCSGs established in 3 new dzongkhags. New 4-year project funded to cover period 2014-2018.
2016	LCSGs established in 4 new dzongkhags.
2018	LCSGs established in remaining 4 dzongkhags.
2020	All 20 dzongkhags covered by established, effective LCSGs.

The 6 dzongkhags covered by the CEPF project have already been selected, and are defined in the project document. However, considerable flexibility remains concerning which dzongkhags to expand into during future phases of the programme. In order to guide the selection of dzongkhags to expand into during future phases, the following criteria have been developed:

- Fit with donor priorities.
- Link to RSPN's strategic goals: endangered species (Punakha and Dagana for White-bellied Heron) and ecosystems outside protected areas (Haa, Samtse and Chukha for Tri-junction).
- Seriousness of local environmental issues.
- Level of interest shown by local people in establishing an LCSG.
- Regional balance between the west, centre and east of the country.

7.2 Monitoring and evaluation of the network

It is important that RSPN is able to monitor the development of the LCSG network and evaluate its effectiveness, in order that it can: (i) target resources towards addressing priority capacity development needs; (ii) document good practice that can be shared with other LCSGs; (iii) demonstrate success to donors (both existing and potential) and other supporters; and (iv) identify aspects of RSPN's own core capacity to support the LCSG network that could be strengthened.

One tool that is widely used by the Birdlife Partnership to monitor the development of individual groups is the *LCSG Capacity Assessment Tool*. This tool can be used to assess the initial capacity needs of new LCSGs, as well as to monitor developments in LCSG capacity over time. The tool is applied during a meeting of

LCSG members, facilitated by external assessors (who could be RSPN staff). The tool assesses 40 aspects of organisational capacity, grouped into four categories: (i) Aspirations and Strategy; (ii) Organisational Skills; (iii) Human Resources; and (iv) Systems, Infrastructure and Organisational Structure. Weightings are used to enable the assessors to identify clear capacity needs in each category, and a space is provided for capturing the reasons why particular scores were given. The LCSG Capacity Assessment Tool could be adapted to the Bhutanese context, and applied on an annual basis to monitor the capacity of individual LCSGs.

With regard to evaluating the effectiveness of the LCSG network, a core function of each LCSG will be to monitor biodiversity status, pressure and conservation response indicators. Changes in these indicators over time can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of LCSGs, as effective groups would be expected to record improvements in biodiversity status and conservation response, and decreases in pressure, unless the sites at which they are working were subject to severe impacts outside of their control. RSPN should consider producing an annual report, summarising the monitoring results collected by the LCSGs, and highlighting emerging conservation issues affecting multiple dzongkhags. These reports could feed into national State of the Environment reporting, and/or government reports under multinational environmental agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity.



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