





















Agri-Food Conference Start-Up Centre, Changzamtog, Thimphu

29th- 30th August, 2024

Conference Document

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Issues, Discussion and Way Forward

Background

The Agri-Food Conference was held from 29 to 30 August 2024 to have a multistakeholder discussion on the constraints and solutions identified by the private sector to improve the commercialization and market linkages in the agri-food sector. A meeting with the Agri-Food Enterprises and the Department of Agricultural Marketing and Cooperatives (DAMC) preceded it. The preliminary meeting leading to the conference was held on 30 July 2024.

The Conference was attended by more than 90 participants with different stakeholder representations comprising Aggregators, Agri-Food Enterprises, Entrepreneurs, Dzongkhag Agriculture Officers and Economic Development and Marketing Officers.

Main Workshop Findings

The Workshop presented and discussed the issues identified by the private sector during the preparatory meeting on 30th July ,2024. The issues raised, what was discussed, and the proposed solutions are discussed in the section below.

During the <u>first day</u>, the Chief Guest of the event, Director of DAMC began by sharing the 13th plan objectives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and the DAMC. The Director expressed appreciation for all the agri-food enterprises and the stakeholders from the Dzongkhags for participating in the conference.

This was proceeded by the presentation on the findings of the survey conducted among 11 agri-food enterprises on the needs for different agri-produce raw materials from the farmers and how they face shortages. The representatives of the eight South-Western Dzongkhags, the Dzongkhag Agriculture Officers and the Economic Development and Marketing Officers, presented on the crop availability in their respective areas.

During the <u>second day</u>, the aggregator model – an important tool introduced in the 13FYP – was discussed between aggregators, DAMC, and experts in the morning. Thereafter, speaker from CNR and a Food Technologist working with the private sector shared their experiences and insights on how they can help address the challenges agri-food enterprises have raised. Over lunch agri-food enterprises displayed their local and value added products, which was witnessed by the Honourable Secretary of the MoAL and six members of Aman Kora resort Purchasing and Chefs. The invitation was extended to Aman Kora in particular due to the existing marketing linkage between and the Aggregator Network of Chhukha for the supply of agricultural and livestock products. After lunch, the Honourable Secretary, the head of the Bhutan Association of Cottage, Small and Medium Industries, and an Economist of the World Bank shared their views on the next steps.

By the end of the conference, a total of ten off-take agreements were signed by facilitating networking between the Agri-Food Enterprises and the Aggregators, DAOs and EDMOs of the Dzongkhags. The total volume agreed under this contract was 42.2 MT of different crops and vegetables.

Way forward

The section summarizes the issues and solutions discussed during the conference and the suggestions of the participants on the way forward.

Day 1: 29th August, 2024

Issues Raised # 1: Bhutan lacks public information systems that track agricultural production and marketing information.

Discussion: An online platform could track agricultural production and marketing as there is a requirement for agricultural produce by the Agri-Food Enterprises and producers need a place to sell. There are many agricultural products in various locations across the country and the buyers need to know where the particular produce is.

Way Forward: The DAMC shall collaborate with the relevant stakeholders to develop an online platform for agricultural production and marketing information.

Issue Raised # 2: The lack of standardized and accredited laboratories for nutritional testing in the country constrains agri-food enterprises from accessing high-end markets.

Discussion: There is a need to collaborate and enhance nutritional lab testing facilities in Bhutan as the existing ones are not enough and upto the international standards.

Way Forward: The BFDA and DAMC needs to facilitate access to the nutritional lab testing of commodities intended for export. For example, by strengthening the partnership with CNR, the government could support entrepreneurs' usage of certification and labelling services.

Issue Raised # 3: The Agri-Food Enterprises are not able to penetrate the high-end hotels and restaurant market segment.

Discussion: Previous efforts to penetrate the segment of high-end hotels and restaurants have seen limited success. These institutes rely on their existing supply chains using imported products. The local Bhutanese stories associated with the local produce need to be promoted and linked to markets with high-end hotels. Agri-food entrepreneurs can strengthen their negotiation position by selling the Bhutanese experience of eating domestic food products which help to sustain the country's rural communities, unique heritage, and environmental leadership. The role of DAMC as a marketing agency of the government is crucial to support and promote such linkages.

Way Forward: The DAMC and DoT with the support of the Agri-Food Enterprises shall initiate platforms and meetings for linkage and awareness to facilitate market linkages for Agri-Food Enterprises for the supply of Bhutanese agri-food products with the high-end hotels and restaurants.

Issue Raised # 4: Buyers are concerned about the authentication of the source for commodities sourced from farmers to agri-enterprises.

Discussion: Product authentication from the source, i.e. from farmers to agri-enterprises is a concern. Food Enterprises raised issues regarding the authenticity of commodities sourced from farmers, noting that some local commodities, such as wheat, get mixed with cheap imported goods, which makes their origin and quality questionable.

Way Forward: Government officials at the Gewog (Gewog Agriculture Extension Supervisors) shall authenticate agricultural products where necessary in terms of source of origin, as done for livestock products taken to the market from the villages.

Issued Raised # 5: Bhutan needs appropriate price-setting models to address raw material price fluctuations throughout the season while agri-food enterprises need to fix the prices of processed or value-added products.

Discussion: Due to the seasonality of agricultural production and competition with

cheap, low-quality imported products, the prices agri-food enterprises pay for raw material and the prices farmers receive fluctuate over time. Price setting by farmers are based on the prior season and not based on market conditions. Therefore, negotiations between buyers and sellers remain informal and verbal. The most important aspect of negotiations is based on trust and repeated transactions between the buyer and seller.

Way Forward: DAMC with the support of Development Partners to study appropriate models for price setting in Bhutan's context based on building trust and with some contractual agreements for accountability.

Day 2: 30th August, 2024

Issue Raised # 6: Agricultural and Livestock Marketing Aggregator models may need further study and deeper research.

Discussion: For the aggregator network and the marketing mechanisms, what works in one Dzongkhag may not work in other Dzongkhags because of the geography or the market segment. Therefore, conducting proper studies of existing agricultural and livestock marketing mechanisms in every Dzongkhag is crucial. We don't want to disrupt the supply chains where the private sector is active and doing well. Also, aggregators should be considered service providers who can work in any existing value chain and deliver additional services (e.g., inputs) to farmers in addition to aggregation services.

Way Forward: The DAMC may seek Development Partners like JICA to support for conducting such studies and building them as part of future project.

Issue Raised # 7: A better understanding of Bhutanese consumption patterns and preferences is needed.

Discussion: If we are serious about implementing a market-led approach, we need to better understand what Bhutanese consumers expect. First, due to changes in their income, consumers' preferences are changing. Second, certain consumption hotspots are arising, such as the Gyalsung or GMC. Third, the market for agricultural products needs to be segmented, as some market segments can pay a price premium.

Way Forward: DAMC to commission a study to understand what Bhutanese consumers in different types of market segments are looking for and how DAMC can coordinate supply and aggregation to meet the demand.

Issue Raised # 8: Academic institutes, like CNR, need to be engaged in agricultural value chain development.

Discussion: The CNR is mandated to partner with the agri-food industry for green innovation and to meet consumer demand. While some pilots are happening (agarwood, wine association), they are ad-hoc, small-scale, and demand-driven.

Way Forward: The DAMC should systematically engage CNR in offering product development and nutrition testing services or training for agri-food enterprises.

Issue Raised # 9: Diversify Cost Sharing Mechanisms and Subsidy of Government and DAMC to the Agri-Food Enterprises

Discussion: One of the challenges for agri-food enterprises is upgrading processes and controlling quality and lack of access to opportunities for knowledge building through exposure and learning. Access to technologies is usually not the problem, but identifying the right technology and optimum and sustainable management is.

Way Forward: The DAMC should consider diversifying the support to the Agri-Food

Enterprises like providing funding for travel outside country on a cost-sharing basis and providing learning opportunities from similar enterprises in the region, build knowledge and establish business linkages. The DAMC may make proposals to embassies and consulates to arrange such exposure trips for the Agri-Food Enterprises.

Issue Raised # 10: Enhancing Agriculture Export from Bhutan

Discussion: Bhutan possesses significant potential for agricultural exports and value-added products. However, to fully realize this potential, optimizing every investment and maximizing returns is crucial. This necessitates a deeper exploration and penetration of international markets. Promotion of products through awareness campaign either physically in mega cities or shopping centers or through social media is very important.

In addition, trial marketing or enlisting products on the shelves of supermarkets in big cities and financial support (on cost-sharing) from government and creating access to export financing is very critical to the agri-entrepreneurs involved in export.

Way Forward: There is need to form an Agricultural and Livestock Commodity Export Facilitation Team to focus efforts on niche exports and enhance market exploration.

This would ensure accurate information and market intelligence, reducing reliance on trial-and-error approaches to accessing foreign markets. DAMC may initiate forming such a team by involving all relevant agencies, such as the Department of Trade, Embassies and Consulates of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade in particular.

Annexure 1: Agri-Food Product Display and Participation of Aman Kora Hotel

On the second day of the conference on 30th August, a side event was conducted before the sessions began for the day. This included display of agri-food products by the 15 enterprises inside the Startup Centre Hall.

Table 1: List of enterprises who took part in the product display

SI No.	Agri-Food Enterprises	Name of Display Owner
1	Bhutan Herbal tea	Sonam Chokie
2	Bhutan Blossom	Thinley Namgay
3	Bhutan Growers	Chimi Yangzom
4	Dragon Spring Water	Subash Tamang
5	Druna Ghu	Chimi Dema
6	Gensum Pasta	Yangchen
7	Gurjo HerbalTea	Bidyash Chhetri
8	Minkai Tea	Tshering Deki
9	Mugwort Solution	Jeewan Baral
10	NTT Fengsi Production	Sonam Zangmo
11	Serkar Dairy	Sanjok Biswa
12	Shoulee Food Products	Pema Lhaden
13	Tara Noodles	Yangchen Dema
14	Tshejor's Aezey	Tshewang Dema
15	Yiga Chocolate	Kinley Dema

List of Officials of Aman Kora Resort who witnessed the display by Agri-Food Enterprises

Table 2: List of officials of Aman Kora Resort who took part to observe the Agri-Food Products Display

SI No	Name of Official	Designation
1	Rigzin Chodra	Purchasing Manager
2	Sha Bdr. Pradhan	Sr. Chef, Thimphu Aman Lodge
3	Karma Namgay	Purchasing Officer, Aman, Thimphu
4	Purna Prasad Phuyel	FNB Manager, Aman, Thimphu Aman
5	Tshering Dorji	Sr. Chef, Thimphu Aman Lodge
6	Kinley Dorji	Agriculture Farming and Community Coordinator, Aman Kora

Annexure 2: Buyer-Seller Meet & Off-Take Agreements

The details of Commodities and Buyers and Sellers are listed in the table below:

Table 3: List of Buyers & Sellers who signed the off-take agreements for linkage

SI No	Name of Buyer	Affiliation	Location	Commodity Agreed for Buy-Sel	Qty Agreed (MT)	Name of Seller	Affiliation	Location		
1	Ugyen	Bio	Thimphu	Turmeric	1.5	Tshering	Chairman,	Dungna		
		Bhutan		Ginger	2	Dorji	Aggregator Network of			
				Honey	1		Chhukha			
2	Sonam Chokie	Herbal	Paro	Moringa	0.4	Tshering	Chairman,	Dungna		
		Bhutan		Rockbee Honey	0.1	Dorji	Aggregator Network of Chhukha			
				Honey Natural	0.1		- Crimania			
3	Thinley Yangzom	Bhutan Super	Paro	Bitter Buckwheat	2	Tshering Dorji	Chairman, Aggregator	Dungna		
		Foods		Sweet Buckwheat	6	Network of Chhukha				
				Wheat	0.3					
				Ginger	3.5					
				Beetroot	1					
				Quinoa	2					
				Turmeric	3.5					
4	Indra Bdr	Mountain	Paro	Ginger	1	Chandra	Aggregator	Samtse		
	Ghalley	Coffee		Dragon Fruit	0.5	Bdr Ghalley	network of Samtse			
				Kewi	0.2					
				Cardamom	0.2					
				Orange	1					
5	Indra Bdr Ghalley	Mountain Coffee	Paro	Black Pepper	0.2	Kushman Sharma	Aggregator network of Samtse	Samtse		
				Sweet Buckwheat	0.2					
				Millet	0.2					
				Orange	1					
				Cardamom	0.5					
6	Indra Bdr	Mountain	Paro	Honey	0.2	Ganesh Bdr Ghalley			Aggregator network of Samtse	Samtse
	Ghalley	Coffee		Ginger	0.3					
				Turmeric	0.2					
				Rice	0.5					
				Arucanut	1					
7		Mountain Paro		0.5	Mon Bdr	Aggregator	Chhukha			
	Ghalley	Coffee		Ginger	1	Ghalley	Ghalley	Ghalley network of Chhukha		
				Turmeric	1]	1 3
				Millet	0.5					
8	Chimi Wangmo	Bhutan	Thimphu	Perilla	3	Tshering	Tshering	Chairman,	Dungna	
		Grower		Mustard Seed	3	Dorji	Aggregator Network of			

				Dry Chilli	2		Chhukha	
9	Tshering Deki	Minkai	Thimphu	Fiddle Fern	Not Specified	Tshering Dorji	Chairman, Aggregator	Dungna
				Pumpkin	Not Specified		Network of Chhukha	
				Egg Plant	Not Specified			
10	Sonam Zangmo	NTT Fengsi	Thimphu	Bitter Buckwheat	0.3	Tshering Dorji	Chairman, Dun Aggregator	Dungna
		Production		Sweet Buckwheat	0.3		Network of Chhukha	

Annexure 3: Participants List

Table 5: Participants' List

SI.#	Name of Participant	Organization	Affiliation
1	Choki Dolma	Aggregator - Chhukha	AGN-Chhukha
2	Lhab Dorji	Aggregator- Chukha	AGN-Chhukha
3	Mon Bdr. Ghalley	Aggregator- Chukha	AGN-Chhukha
4	Rinchen Dorji	Aggregator - Chhukha	AGN-Chhukha
5	Tshendra Dorji	Aggregator - Chhukha	AGN-Chhukha
6	Tshering Dorji	Aggregator - Chhukha	AGN-Chhukha
7	Tshering Om	Aggregator - Chhukha	AGN-Chhukha
8	Tshewang Zam	Aggregator - Chhukha	AGN-Chhukha
9	Garjaman Rai	Aggregator - Samtse	AGN-Samtse
10	Godhak Singh	Aggregator - Samtse	AGN-Samtse
11	Kushman Sharma	Aggregator - Samtse	AGN-Samtse
12	Kusum Dorji Tamang	Aggregator - Samtse	AGN-Samtse
13	Buddha Singh	Aggregator - Samtse	AGN-Samtse
14	Chandra Gurung	Aggregator - Samtse	AGN-Samtse
15	Ganesh Bdr Ghalley	Aggregator - Samtse	AGN-Samtse
16	Tula Ram Ghalley	Aggregator - Samtse	AGN-Samtse
17	Chhimi Wangmo	Bhutan Growers	Agri-Food Enterprise
18	Sonam Chophel	President, ABCSMI	Agri-Food Enterprise
19	Chimi Dema	Dru Na Ghu	Agri-Food Enterprise
20	Dorjee Tso	Umami condiments	Agri-Food Enterprise
21	Jampal Lhamo	Bhutan Growers	Agri-Food Enterprise
22	Jangchub Dorji	Kuen-Gha Potato Fingerling	Agri-Food Enterprise
23	Jigme Dorji	Bhutanese Youth Initiative Project	Agri-Food Enterprise
24	Kuenga Dhendup	Kingdom Essences Private Limited	Agri-Food Enterprise
25	Mitesh Biswa	Dragon milk processing	Agri-Food Enterprise
26	Nauraj Rai	smart blind entrepreneur	Agri-Food Enterprise
27	Nenda Wangchuk	Bhutan Natura by SiFID	Agri-Food Enterprise
28	Pema Dakpa	Tshejor's Azey	Agri-Food Enterprise
29	Pema Lhadon	Shaoulee food	Agri-Food Enterprise
30	Phuntsho Om	Yaata	Agri-Food Enterprise
31	Sonam Chokie	Bhutan Herbal Tea	Agri-Food Enterprise
32	Sonam Ghalley	The Shards and Rim	Agri-Food Enterprise
33	Sonam Tandin Phurba	Gongphel Agro Industry	Agri-Food Enterprise
34	Sonam zangmo	NTT Fengsi Production	Agri-Food Enterprise
35	Subash Tamang	Dragon Milk Processing	Agri-Food Enterprise
36	Tenzin Thinley	KAR10 Agri- Enterprise	Agri-Food Enterprise
37	Thinley Namgay	Bhutan Blossom	Agri-Food Enterprise
38	Thinley Yangzom	Bhutan Superfood	Agri-Food Enterprise
39	Tshering Deki	Minkai	Agri-Food Enterprise

41 Ugyen Bio-Bhutan Agri-Food Enterprise 42 Ugyen Tshering Pure Bhutan Agri-Food Enterprise 43 Ugyen Tshering Pure Bhutan Agri-Food Enterprise 44 Yangchen Dema Tara Dolma Noodle Agri-Food Enterprise 45 Yangchen Pangchen Agri-Food Enterprise 46 Kinley Wangmo Yeega Chocolates Agri-Food Enterprise 47 Yeshey Choden Chuniding Foods Agri-Food Enterprise 48 Kesang Choden Chuniding Foods Agri-Food Enterprise 49 Jeewan Powdyel The Mugwort Solutions Agri-Food Enterprise 50 Bidyash Chhetria Gurjo Herbal Tea Agri-Food Enterprise 51 Tshering Lhamo Sunflower Seed Oil Agri-Food Enterprise 52 Karma Chophel Bhutan Natura Agri-Food Enterprise 53 Kinley Dhewa Vegan Agri-Food Enterprise 54 Karma Wangchuk Lecturer Official 55 Dorji Rinchen Dy. CEDMO, DAMC Official	40	Tshewang Dema	Tshejors Eazay	Agri-Food Enterprise
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Annexure 4: Program of the Conference

Agri-Food Conference

29-30 August, 2024

Background

On 30th July, 2024, a meeting was held with the Agri-Food Enterprises in Thimphu and discussed challenges and solutions of the enterprises for the government and the relevant stakeholders to work together.

It was agreed at the meeting that a follow-up discussion will be held with the Agri-Food Enterprises to seek areas for support and collaboration. In this regard, a conference will be held on 29th and 30th August, 2024 for the wider audience and with participation of officials from the eight South-Western Dzongkhags to promote agricultural marketing and network.

Objectives of the Conference

- 1. Discuss cross-cutting issues facing the Agri Food Enterprises to the relevant stakeholders.
- 2. Facilitate Buyer-Seller Networking.
- 3. Develop an Action Plan for solutions derived from the Conference.

Day 1: Thursday, 29th August

Time	Agenda	Facilitator
8:45 AM	Registration of Participants	
9:10	Arrival of Chief Guest	
9:10 – 9:20	Opening Ceremony	
	Session I - Morning	
9:20 – 9:40	Overview of the Conference	Moderator
9:40 – 10:00	Keynote Address by the Director of DAMC	DAMC
10:00 – 10:20	Addressing the disconnect between supply	AMFO
	and demand for food products in Bhutan. Presentation of Survey Report of Raw Material	
	Demand list of Agri-Food Enterprises	
10:20 - 10:45	Supply Situation of Agricultural, Livestock and	EDMOs/DAOs
	Forest Products of South-Western	& Aggregators
	Dzongkhags	
10:45 - 11:00	Tea & Networking Break	
11:00 - 12:00 PM	Continued: Supply Situation of Agricultural,	EDMOs/DAOs
	Livestock and Forest Products of South-	& Aggregators
	Western Dzongkhags	
12:00 - 1:00 PM	Q&A and Discussion	Moderator
1:00 - 2:00	Networking Lunch	
	Session II - Afternoon	
2:00 - 4:00	Panel Discussion: Issues and Solutions to	Agency
	Agri-Food Enterprises in Bhutan: Q&A with the	Representatives
	Agency Representatives from Government	and Panellists
	and the Enterprises.	

	 A 10 minutes presentation by each agency (DoA, DoT, BFDA, DoEE, NPHC, DAMC) ABCSI, Loden, BEA to reflect on the Discussion Q&A with participants (1 hr) 	
4:00 - 5:00	Introduction to Buyer-Seller Agreements	Joachim, World Bank
5:30 - 8:00	Networking Dinner	Organizer

Day 2: Friday, 30th August

Time	Agenda	Facilitator
	Session I: Morning	
9:00 – 10:00	Proposal for Piloting Aggregator Network in 8 South-Western Dzongkhags (Only DAOs and EDMOs to attend)	AMFO & World Bank
10:00 - 11:00 AM	Lunch and Display of Products by Enterprises	Aggregators and Food Enterprises
11:00 - 11:30	Buyer-Seller Networking and signing of Buyer-Seller Agreements	Moderator
11:30 - 12:00	Collaboration opportunities for Agri-Food Enterprises with College of Natural Resources (CNR)	Karma Wangchuk, CNR
12:00 - 12:30	 Import substitution of Agri-Food Products Case example of Dried Chili, Turmeric Powder and Onion. 	Honourable Pema Drakpa
12:30 - 1:00	Branding of Bhutanese Agri-Food Products for International Markets - Discussion	Moderator
1:00 - 2:00	Lunch & Networking.	
	Session II: Afternoon	
2:00 - 2:40 PM	Presentation on the outcome of Pre- Conference Meeting of Agri-Food Enterprises	Agri-Food Enterprise Representative
2:40 -3:40	Session with Dasho Secretary, MoAL	Dasho Secretary, MoAL
3:40 - 4:15	International Marketing Prospects for Agricultural & Livestock Products from Bhutan	Sonam Chophel, President, ABCSMI
4:15 – 4:45	RNR Jobs - World Bank Country Proposal for Agricultural Production & Marketing	Joachim, World Bank
4:45 – 5:30	Presentation of Way Forward & Wrap-up	Moderator