

## **BRECSA: Youth Engagement Strategy**

### **A. Introduction**

1. The Bhutanese society is still predominantly agricultural and yet the country's food system faces a number of challenges. While Bhutan witnessed rapid development over the past decades, its food system failed to keep up with the pace. Even though more than half of the country's population work in agriculture, the sector contributed to only 19.23% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020, substantially less than both the industry and service sector<sup>1</sup>. This is mainly due to the country's challenging terrain, low soil fertility, small and scattered land holdings, high production costs and marketing issues<sup>2</sup>. With a GDP contraction of 10.08% in 2020, Bhutan's economy was among the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in the South Asian region<sup>3</sup>. The crisis amplified chronic fractures within the Bhutanese economy and agriculture sector. Enforced border closures and two major lockdowns put the country, highly dependent on tourism and Indian food imports, under pressure. Policy makers reacted by providing support schemes to boost local food production and promote the long sought-after goal of self-sufficiency.
2. Youth engagement in the agriculture sector is crucial to counteract youth unemployment and meet the labour requirements needed to realise the government's ambitious goals of promoting the commercialisation of agriculture and achieving self-sufficiency. More than half of Bhutan's population is under 27 years old, and youth unemployment has been subject of public concern for many years<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, young people face several challenges and struggle to pursue economically viable and meaningful livelihoods in rural areas. Major constraints for rural youth include a shortage of employment opportunities as well as limited access to knowledge, land, financial services, and markets. Consequently, this drives rural to urban and international migration, and leads to vast implications for the economic development of rural areas<sup>5</sup>. Young women and girls often face a double burden as they experience additional challenges associated with health issues, gender-based discrimination and increased household responsibilities.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted the labour market with youth (15-24) unemployment skyrocketing, reaching an all-time high of 22.6% in 2020, thereby almost doubling since 2019 and quadrupling compared to 2003<sup>6</sup>. As a result, youth are increasingly being prioritised and mainstreamed in agricultural development programs, exploiting their potential to be the driving force for inclusive rural transformation. New approaches are being developed to motivate youth and make the sector more attractive, as it is widely recognised that agriculture requires hard work while promising low economic return. Therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> National Statistics Bureau (NSB) Bhutan, 2021. *National Accounts Statistics 2021*.

<sup>2</sup> Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), 2021. *Bhutan - Food System Assessment - WORKING TOWARDS THE SDGs*.

<sup>3</sup> National Statistics Bureau (NSB) Bhutan, 2021. *National Accounts Statistics 2021*.

<sup>4</sup> Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC), 2019. *Twelfth Five Year Plan 2018-2023*.

<sup>5</sup> National Statistics Bureau (NSB) Bhutan, 2020. *2020 Labour Force Survey Report Bhutan*.

<sup>6</sup> National Statistics Bureau (NSB) Bhutan, 2020. *2020 Labour Force Survey Report Bhutan*.

working in this sector is often considered undesirable amongst the young generation.

4. Grounded in the philosophy of the Gross National Happiness approach, the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) defined a range of youth-related policies and strategies. The National youth policy<sup>7</sup> outlines government priorities and goals for youth and the issue of unemployment. This was further elaborated on by the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (MoLHR) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) through a systemic portfolio-based approach<sup>8</sup>. In recent years, significant investments have been made to implement youth-targeted programs through national agencies, partially in partnership with a range of international organisations. Amongst these, the Youth Engagement and Livelihood Program (YELP)<sup>9</sup> developed by the MoLHR presents a key public measure to enhance the employability of job seekers entering the labour market and to address the changing workforce needs. Additional support measures for youth include the Land Use Certificate (LUC) program as well as micro credit facilities.
5. To achieve long-lasting change and increased engagement of youth in the agriculture sector, it is crucial to understand young farmers' motivations and aspirations. Conversations with youth in IFADs *Building Resilient Commercial Smallholder Agriculture* (BRECSA) program and *Commercial Agriculture and Resilient Livelihoods Enhancement Programme* (CARLEP) in Bhutan have shown that youth are more inclined to take up on- and off-farm activities with the use of machinery and modern technologies, delivering higher returns for less physical labour. Furthermore, pull factors for farming activities go beyond economic incentives. Motivators to take up farming are diverse, ranging from meaningfulness over the preservation of Bhutanese culture, closeness to nature, achieving self-sufficiency and producing healthy food for themselves and their customers.

## **B. Objective**

6. The main objective of the youth engagement strategy is examining youth motivations and aspirations in the BRECSA and CARLEP areas to propose interventions for making the sector more attractive to the young generation. Thereby, it aims to propose pathways that help facilitate an image change of agriculture, from being amongst the lowest form of employment to something desirable and economically viable. With this, rural livelihoods and economies can be transformed and strengthened, offering an alternative to urban migration. Enhanced youth engagement in agriculture would not only counteract

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<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Education, Department of Youth and Sports, 2011. *National Youth Policy*.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Labour and Human Resources & United Nations Development Program, 2022. *Addressing the Youth Unemployment Challenge in Bhutan Through a Systemic Portfolio-Based Approach*

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Labour and Human Resource, Department of Employment and Human Resources, 2021. *Guideline for Youth Engagement and Livelihood Program*.

unemployment and rural-to-urban migration, but also ensure Bhutan's short- and long-term food security.

7. BRECSA is designed to address gaps between agricultural development interventions and the needs of young people on the ground. With this, BRECSA will complement, and build upon, existing public youth employment schemes such as Gyalsung<sup>10</sup>, De-suung<sup>11</sup> as well as Technical and Vocational Education and Training programs (TVET).
8. BRECSA is a youth-sensitive program, with 30 % of the 12,074 target households being youth. Youth are defined as a non-homogenous group of young women and men aged 18-35<sup>12</sup>. The main youth groups targeted in the program interventions are (i) out of school youth; (ii) unemployed youth; (iii) youth with disabilities; and (iv) young women.

### C. Method

9. **Design:** The study employs an exploratory qualitative study design, drawing on data derived from interviews and observations with an emphasis on the meanings and interpretations of the participants.
10. **Participants:** Participants interviewed in this study were a total of 29 Bhutanese youth engaged in on- and off-farm activities. Additionally, data was derived from conversations with representatives from the Bhutanese government, private businesses, and Civil Society Organisations (CSO) across 6 dzongkhags (districts). Interviews and observations were held in three BRECSA districts, namely Sarpang, Tsirang and Trongsa; in two CARLEP districts, Mongar and Trashigang; as well as in the capital Thimphu.
11. Youth consulted in this study can be categorised in three groups based on their relationship to IFAD: (i) potential, (ii) present, and (iii) past IFAD beneficiaries. Participants in the BRECSA districts were exclusively potential beneficiaries, whereas those in the CARLEP districts were either currently or previously affiliated with IFAD. Table 1 displays the geographical distribution of youth interviewed for this assessment, disaggregated by gender. A complete overview of research sites and informants can be found in Appendix 1.

Dzongkhag	Youth farmers	Male	Female	Potential beneficiaries	Present beneficiaries	Past beneficiaries
Sarpang	4	1	3	4	0	0

<sup>10</sup> *Gyalsung* is a one-year integrated training program mandatory for all youths attaining the age of 18 and if in school – upon completion of grade twelve. It includes three months of basic military training followed by nine months of specialised training in various fields ranging from home construction technologies, computing and entrepreneurship to focused development of skills in agriculture. Information at <http://www.gyalsunginfra.bt>

<sup>11</sup> *De-suung* is an Integrated Training Programme instituted to be a value-based personal development program with the main objective to encourage all citizens to be active in the greater role of nation building. Information at <https://desuung.org.bt>

<sup>12</sup> The BRECSA definition of youth differs from the RGoB definition (young people aged 15-24).

<b>Tsirang</b>	3	0	3	3	0	0
<b>Trongsa</b>	4	3	1	4	0	0
<b>Trashigang</b>	6	5	1	0	5	1
<b>Mongar</b>	12	9	3	0	12	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1</b>

Table 1: Overview of youth farmers consulted for the youth engagement strategy

12. **Procedure:** Data collection for the study took place in Southern and Eastern Bhutan and consisted of two phases. Firstly, face-to-face interviews and field observations were conducted in the southern dzongkhags Sarpang, Tsirang and Trongsa during the joint IFAD and WFP BRECSA project design mission from the 2nd - 10th of May 2022, followed by official meetings with government agencies and CSOs in the capital Thimphu. Secondly, data collection in the East, in Mongar and Trashigang, took place between the 14th and 18th of May 2022 and was facilitated by the CARLEP team.
13. Site visits and interviews were organised and facilitated by the Bhutanese government and IFAD. Study sites and participants in the BRECSA districts were chosen by government and IFAD representatives based on their relevance for the design mission. Participants in Mongar and Trashigang were diverse (ex-)beneficiaries of CARLEP selected for the purpose of this study. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. Conversations with informants were partially held in English or translated from/into Dzongkha by an IFAD representative. The interviews were not recorded, but manual notes were taken during the sessions which were digitised and organised thereafter.
14. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with open and closed-ended questions, whereas the interview approach and objectives slightly differed in the two research stages. During the first stage, the BRECSA design mission, the researcher was part of a 16-headed team consisting of government representatives and experts from IFAD and WFP. Some interviews were conducted solely by the researcher whereas the majority were held jointly with other experts. Subjects of concern for the youth engagement strategy included opportunities and constraints for on- and off-farm income generation; youth's aspirations, personal relationships, and attitudes towards farming; as well as required support to engage in farming or off-farm enterprises. In the second stage, individual and more in-depth interviews were conducted with the objective to acquire a deeper understanding of the attitudes, values, and aspirations of the youth. This was realised by asking questions concerning their life choices, relationship to agriculture and aspirations. Brief interview guides can be found in Appendix 2.
15. **Data analysis:** Thematic analysis as a qualitative method was performed to identify- and map patterns in the interview data. The process of analysis began with data familiarisation during the digitalisation of the handwritten notes. The data was organised, and observations were continuously written down and reflected upon. Findings from the first data collection stage were discussed with

the mission team. After finishing the second data collection phase, the data was compiled and treated as one data set.

16. The observations and semi-structured interviews conducted in the BRECSA and CARLEP districts gave insights into youth and young people's attitudes towards farming, their motivations, and aspirations. No significant differences were observed between the Dzongkhags.

## **D. Findings**

17. **Ambivalent view of agriculture:** Despite strategic aspirations outlined in the National youth policy as well as investments in youth-targeted programs such as land provision under the LUC scheme and the YELP, interest of Bhutanese youth in agriculture remains low. Conversations with youth confirmed findings from previous studies concerning causes of decreasing youth engagement in the agriculture sector.
18. Amongst young Bhutanese in the BRECSA and CARLEP districts, agriculture is widely seen as laborious and precarious, and the sector generally finds itself on the lower end when compared to other employment opportunities. Farming is not preferred by youth, as this generation generally opts for the more comfortable, glamorous city life and is not attracted to high-labour, low-wage, and low-value production employment. Instead, they are attracted to modernization and new practices, use of technology, and opportunities with quick return and relatively high earnings.
19. Further, a poor attitude and work ethic from youth have been reported throughout the data collection period. Many youths lack persistence and quickly lose motivation after an unsuccessful season or crop failure. Youth are portrayed as being unwilling to take risks and incapable to hold the pressure of the harsh farming life. To bridge the gap between the needs of youth and the country's policy priorities, new approaches must be developed that meet the needs and aspirations of rural youth, increase their motivation, and make them identify more with the sector.
20. The low view on agriculture is deeply ingrained in the Bhutanese society. The sector is widely seen as a less valuable job and until today, most farmers in Bhutan work hard to make a living and often struggle to make ends meet. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of parents wish for a different, less challenging life for their children. Especially educated youths are believed to be better off in a government or private sector job and receive little support in their choice of being farmers. Young farmers in the project areas reported different experiences and levels of support from their families and communities towards their choice of working in agriculture. One youth farmer in the CARLEP area reported that he has not told his friends about his business, as he is too worried about their perception, whereas another stated that he feels encouraged by the appreciation and support by his family, community, and the government.
21. **Changing view on agriculture:** The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about new prospects for agriculture in Bhutan and changed people's perception towards

the sector. The collapse of the private sector and scarcity of urban employment opportunities left young people with no choice but to consider alternatives. Many youths were left without employment and forced to return to their villages. With scarce opportunities in other sectors, agriculture has become one of the most viable employment options and an increasingly attractive choice for many young people regardless of their educational status.

22. Following the agri-tech revolution around the globe, technology is becoming more prevalent in the Bhutanese agri-industry. Conversations with youth and findings from previous assessments indicate that the use of technology attracts young people to the agriculture sector. Young people are inclined to engage with Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) as well as digital solutions and thus, these hold vast potential for the development of the sector. Further assessments have to be made to propose relevant and affordable technologies and innovations for Bhutan.
23. **Lessons learned from CARLEP:** CARLEP has brought forth a number of success stories as well as failures from agricultural youth businesses in the east of Bhutan. A major finding was that youth in CARLEP are especially attracted to dairy and mushroom production. This is mainly due to the less labour-intensive work, a lower risk and higher revenue of these farming businesses.
24. Over 13 youth groups in CARLEP were provided land under the LUC program. Despite a few successful groups, there have been several issues associated with the scheme. Dropout rates in the LUC sites are generally high, which is mainly due to remoteness of lands, lack of water availability and conflicts between the members. For future provision of land, these factors must be considered to ensure efficient resource allocation as well as long-term engagement and success of young farmers.
25. Other challenges faced in CARLEP include conflicts within the youth cooperatives, a lack of coordination, marketing, and storage issues as well as lack of skills and capabilities of youth to successfully run a financially sustainable farming business. Further, most CARLEP activities have been related to primary production. In order to transform the agriculture sector to become a valuable commercial venture with financial return, it is proposed that BRECSA activities encompass the whole food value chain.
26. **Motivational factors for farming:** Young farmers in the BRECSA and CARLEP districts expressed different motivational factors for taking up farm work. When looking at their motivations and aspirations, a significant distinction must be made between educated youth that base their decision to become a farmer on factors beyond economic nature, as compared to uneducated youth or school dropouts with little or no alternatives to make a living. In addition to earning an income, educated youth were motivated by the meaningfulness of the farming lifestyle, preserving Bhutanese culture and traditional ways of life, closeness to nature, contributing to achieving national self-sufficiency and producing healthy food. Most youths had the ambition to expand and scale up their businesses in the future, to teach other youths and to make farming more attractive to them.

27. (i) *Source of income and family support:* Economic gains are the main motivator for young people to engage in farming. It is seen as a long-term investment with high potential and access to a number of support schemes. In contrast to other jobs with regular salaries, earnings from farm work is widely seen as correlated with the amount of work put into it, impacted by the risk of crop failure caused by external forces. Most of the study participants lived with their parents and siblings, whereby agriculture served as the main family income and the family operated as an economic unit. Family has a high value in Bhutanese society, providing a support system and a sense of belonging. Elderly relatives are rarely left unattended and responsibilities of children, both male and female, increase with age. Many of the youths understood it as their duty to look after their parents, work their family land and financially contribute to the education of their younger siblings. Youths employed in agriculture projects away from their hometown expressed the desire of gaining skills and returning to their village to start their own project, benefitting their family and community.
28. (ii) *Living a meaningful life:* Most young farmers expressed that they perceive farming as meaningful, providing them with more than an income. In a holistic way, it fosters self-discovery, contributing to an enriching and meaningful life in the rural areas. Many stated that being a farmer enabled them to be free, flexible, and independent. The sole act of working the land has been described as “fun”, “satisfying” and “rewarding”. Factors adding to the meaningfulness of the activity are both the social and individual nature of farming, the simplicity of life, closeness to nature and the practice in patience and believing in oneself. Young farmers appreciated themselves, feeling a sense of pride, when seeing the harvest resulting from their hard work and manual labour.
29. (iii) *Preserving Bhutanese culture and traditional ways of life:* Farming is an integral part of Bhutanese culture and traditional way of life. Preserving these is a priority of the government, royal family as well as the citizens. One young farmer expressed that “*our culture and traditions are part of our identity. They reflect how people are connected to each other and show how we are united under one leadership. It reflects our identity to others.*” Ancestral knowledge is increasingly valued while efforts are made to restore and conserve it. Culture is fluid and under gradual transformation; The combination of traditional farming methods with modern innovations has the potential to complement each other to make farming businesses less backbreaking and more lucrative.
30. (iv) *Closeness to nature:* Despite being drawn to the modern way of life, the majority of Bhutanese society still lives close to nature and most young farmers expressed a preference for rural over urban life. The remoteness, fresh air and silence made living and working on a farm especially attractive. They felt a deep connection to their natural surroundings and a sense of pride in nurturing the land, producing food in non-destructive ways.
31. (v) *Achieving self-sufficiency:* Young people in Bhutan’s farming sector are concerned about the fragile state of the country's food system. The COVID-19 pandemic has painfully shed light on its vulnerability and reliance on food imports and thus, there is the widespread desire to become more self-sufficient as a country. The pandemic is seen as an opportunity that ought to be used efficiently

to expand agricultural production within the country's borders and reduce food imports. Young farmers are determined to contribute to building a self-sufficient food system for their country and take pride in growing food for their people.

32. (vi) *Producing healthy food*: In recent years, nutrition and health gained popularity in Bhutan. Some young farmers consider food as something medicinal, and the usage of chemical inputs is seen as destructive for human and soil health. Thus, despite pest control challenges, almost all youth prefer organic food production using nature-based solutions, intercropping, and an integrated farming approach. They understand the importance of healthy, high-quality food for both self-consumption and export.
33. **Needs of youth**: Bringing innovation into Bhutan's agriculture sector is indispensable for strengthening the sector and to change the low image of agriculture and to engage young people over the long term. Entrepreneurship is picking up in Bhutan and a number of public and private support schemes for young farmers have been developed. Until now, however, these fail to address the needs of youth in its entirety. To succeed, youth require additional support in terms of business development. Further, supporting ecosystems must be created. The following underlying needs have been expressed by young farmers: (i) increased access to finance and capital; (ii) provision of training and mentorship; (iii) lower financial risk and higher, guaranteed return; (iv) automatization and mechanisation of agriculture to decrease labour intensity; and (v) improved market access.

## E. Media Strategy

34. Media channels and communication platforms can facilitate a shift in the perception of agriculture, inform about the possibilities within the sector and attract more youth into farming in the BRECSA districts. This section presents a brief overview of the media landscape in Bhutan and outlines the most favourable media channels for BRECSA.
35. BRECSA proposes to use a range of different media channels to reach diverse groups of the Bhutanese society. The effective usage of media may lead to an attitude change towards the agriculture sector and hold opportunities for young farmers to build networks and better organise their businesses. The following three types of media are widely used in Bhutan and have the biggest potential as tools to achieve the desired outcomes: (i) print media (newspapers and magazines); (ii) broadcast media (tv and radio); and (iii) social media (social networks and media sharing).
36. **Print media**: The first and until today most popular newspaper in Bhutan is *Kuensel*, a 51% state owned and 49% privately owned autonomous company<sup>13</sup>. In recent years, the country witnessed a rise in private newspapers with 5 major English newspapers and 1 private Dzongkhag newspaper operating across all

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<sup>13</sup> Bhutan Media Foundation, 2018. *Kuensel Corporation Limited*. Retrieved from <http://www.bmf.bt/kuensel-corporation-limited/>



Dzongkhags<sup>14</sup>. Overall, print media is experiencing a downward trend in both print and circulation numbers, and most newspapers today show negative profit margins whereas *Kuensel* is the only one showing a net profit margin<sup>15</sup>. Thus, publishers focus on their online presence which is favoured by both the youth population as well as the older working population.

37. BRECSA will establish collaborations with *Kuensel* and other selected private newspapers to facilitate an attitude change of agriculture and increase youth engagement in farming. This will be achieved by publishing relevant agriculture related content in print and online editions, such as
  - (i) business opportunities, job announcements and advertisements
  - (ii) farming knowledge, practices and resources
  - (iii) market information
  - (iv) success stories from young farmers
38. **Broadcast media:** The broadcast media sector in Bhutan is characterised by a limited number of players, namely one publicly owned terrestrially broadcast television station, along with a number of emergent cable television channels and a few public, commercial and community radio stations<sup>16</sup>. With the launch of the Bhutan Broadcasting Station (BBS) television in 1999, information was brought to most of the country's population, however, in 2017 30% of the population remain without television connections<sup>17</sup>.
39. BRECSA proposes to utilise television and radio channels as tools to reach a broad range of the Bhutanese population and inform about the agriculture sector through broadcasting
  - (i) educational shows for educating smallholder farmers about good agricultural practices
  - (ii) reality shows showcasing successful young farmers
  - (iii) award shows for young farmers
  - (iv) Q&A shows to discuss questions and common challenges of young farmers
40. **Social media:** Social media is widely used in Bhutan, with about 90% of people being active members of at least one social media channel, the most popular ones being Facebook, WeChat and YouTube<sup>18</sup>. Young people with high education levels are the most intensive users of social media, whereas agricultural labourers are among the least intensive user categories.
41. Conversations with youth in the BRECSA and CARLEP districts indicated that most young farmers predominantly use Youtube channels to gain knowledge about farming techniques and methods, and almost all use Facebook to connect with other young farmers.

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<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Information and Communications, Royal Government of Bhutan, 2020. *Report on Sustainability of Print Newspapers in Bhutan Department of Information and Media*.

<sup>15</sup> Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority, Royal Government of Bhutan, 2018. *Determining the Timely Reach and Circulation Figures of the Newspapers for the Year 2018*.

<sup>16</sup> Department of Information and Media Ministry of Information and Communications, Royal Government of Bhutan, 2017. *The Broadcasting Policy of the Royal Government of Bhutan*.

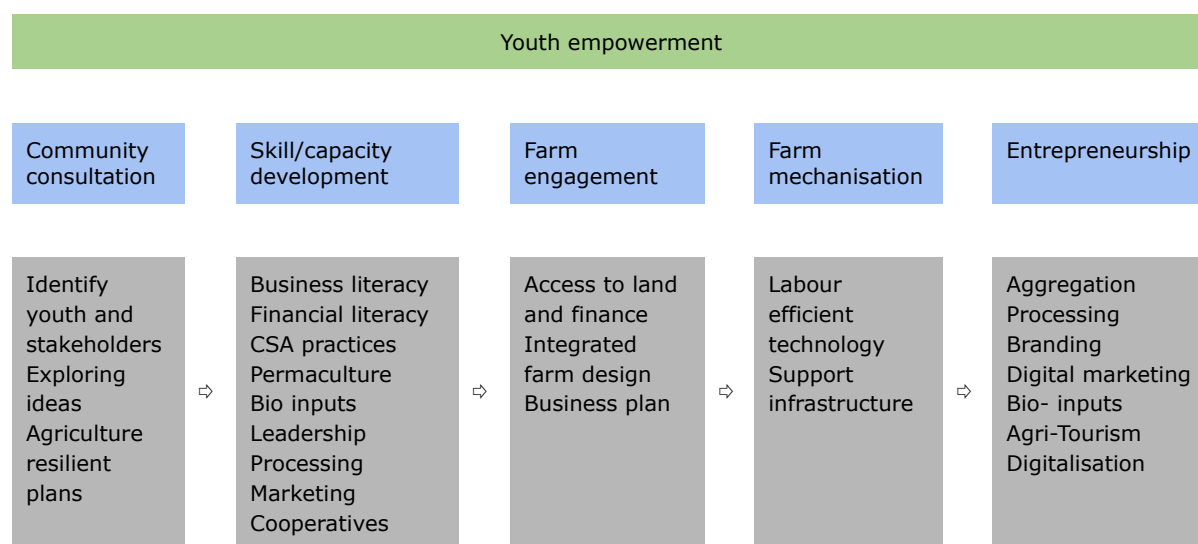
<sup>17</sup> National Statistics Bureau, 2017. *Bhutan Living Standard Survey Report*.

<sup>18</sup> Bhutan Media Foundation, 2021. *Social Media Landscape in Bhutan*.

42. In the case of BRECSA, social media holds the largest potential to leverage an image change of agriculture and increase youth engagement due to the popularity amongst young people. The following four activities build the core of the social media strategy;
- (i) inform about opportunities in the sector (Facebook)
  - (ii) share knowledge about farming challenges, techniques and methods (Facebook, YouTube)
  - (iii) link consumers and producers, strengthen markets, and coordinate demand and supply (Facebook, WeChat)
  - (iv) build networks amongst youth farmers (Facebook, WeChat)
43. Further, it is proposed to establish collaborations and partnerships with influencers such as Farmer Sangay, a young Bhutanese farmer from Gaza with a positive reputation amongst youth and a Facebook audience of almost 130.000.

## F. Youth Engagement Activities

44. The goal of BRECSA is to translate policy support for youth, representing 30% of the project beneficiaries, into meaningful operations on the ground. A range of activities will be implemented to enhance youth employment throughout the entire value chain in on- and off-farm activities. The youth engagement strategy is based on lessons learned from CARLEP and conversations with young farmers in the BRECSA and CARLEP districts. Field visits and interaction with young farmers indicated that the majority are interested in modern agriculture with fewer physical activities and higher, quicker financial returns. In accordance with their personal motivations and aspirations, youth will thus be encouraged to engage in a combination of (i) vegetable production; (ii) high value crops, mushroom, poultry and livestock enterprises; (iii) as well as off-farm activities, including processing, bio-inputs and infrastructure. To foster financially sustainable, long-term engagement of youth in agriculture, BRECSA will focus on facilitating activities such as capacity building, improving access to finance and land as well as enhancing youth's business literacy and entrepreneurship skills. Figure 1 illustrates the areas of youth support and potential partners.



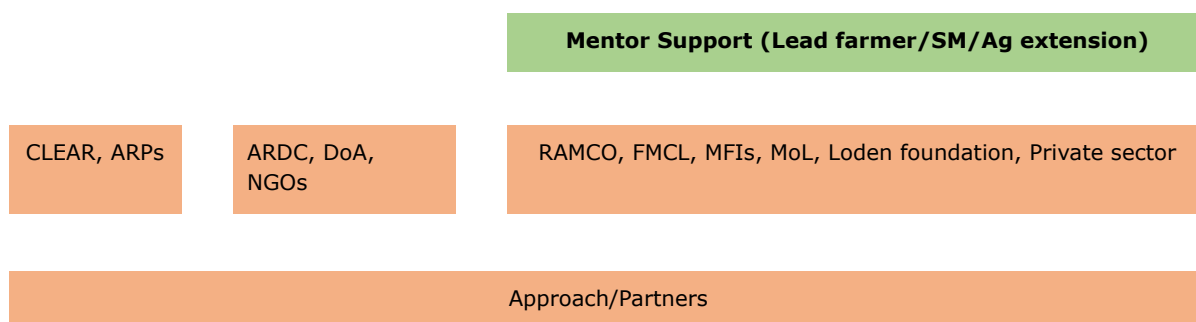


Figure 1: Areas of youth engagement in BRECSA

### Component 1: Resilient Production Systems

45. (i) ensure that the Consolidated Livelihood Exercise for Analyzing Resilience (CLEAR) Plus tools provide youth disaggregated data; increase the agency and voice of youth through their participation in the development of the Agricultural Resilience Plans (ARPs), with a minimum of 30 percent of represented actors brought together to formulate ARPs being youth; and ensure that ARPs articulate the specific support that will be provided to youth farmers.
46. (ii) design the RGoB funded strategic concept of “mega farms” (40-60 acres) as “Hubs” using permaculture concepts, facilitating the production of priority commodities for aggregation and sales as well as providing a training ground for youth and smallholder farmers.
47. (iii) reduce drudgery and increase the productivity of youth through appropriate small machinery and tools for agricultural processing and post-harvest.
48. (iv) support agriculture production enterprises with higher, quick returns and lower labour requirements to attract youth, such as mushrooms, poultry and livestock.
49. (v) undertake an assessment of the production potential of high value and medicinal agriculture production enterprises such as honey and green tea.
50. (vi) provide customised support to youth farmers by providing them with necessary planning tools, capacity building and hands-on training (climate smart agriculture (CSA) technologies and practices, permaculture, business literacy, bookkeeping and market assessment, leadership etc.), nutrition awareness, home garden packages, equipment and inputs for -production and post-harvest inputs, inclusion in cooperatives and market linkages.
51. (vii) support in business development for youth cooperatives to increase the sustainability and profitability of their ventures by providing entrepreneurship training (aggregation, processing, branding, digital marketing, bio inputs, agri-tourism, digitalisation etc.) and 2-year mentoring.

### Component 2: Strengthened Value Chain Coordination and Market Linkages

52. (i) increase youth's agency and voice through their participation in multi-stakeholder forums, with 30 percent of participants being youth.
53. (ii) finance an in-depth study on the role of Youth in BRECSA Value Chains for evidence-based Strategic Investment Plans (SIP); and develop SIPs that articulate specific strategies to meet the needs and priorities of youth.
54. (iii) ensure that 'Hubs' demonstrate production models appropriate for youth small-holder farmers and foster linkages with youth agro-processors.
55. (iv) support and facilitate the usage of ICTs and digital solutions in the agriculture sector to attract and engage youth. These include digital extension services, drones, online price information, e-market platforms etc.
56. (v) provide training, capacity building and mentorship of youth to support and facilitate a successful transfer of 'Hubs' and their facilities to youth-led farmer groups and enterprises.
57. (vi) capacitate youth to start up small-scale agro-businesses linked to the 'Hubs' for production of enriched fodder, biochar, soil stimulants (enhanced micro-organisms), bio-fertilizers, bio-pesticides, Business Development Services (BSD), ICT support etc.
58. (vii) develop an in-depth media strategy and utilise a range of media channels to promote a shift in the perception of agriculture, inform about the possibilities within the sector and attract more youth into farming.
59. (iix) facilitate business linkages and establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms (MSP) to link youth with other relevant stakeholders that engage in the Renewable Natural Resource (RNR) sector.

### **Component 3 – Innovative and competitive agri-food sector**

60. (i) enhance access to and usage of affordable and appropriately designed agricultural financial services and tools for youth such as low interest loans, matching grants and financing based on contract farming.
61. (ii) provide training to individual youth farmers, groups and cooperatives to enhance their financial literacy, skills and knowledge; and to improve their financial habits, financial discipline and investment decisions.
62. (iii) undertake policy dialogue to support the promotion of Brand Bhutan's organic and high-value agri-food products in regional and international markets through recognised regulation, standardisation, and certification processes of youth products.

### **G. Conclusion**

63. The Bhutanese agriculture sector lies at a crossroads and youth play a crucial role in transforming the sector. Agriculture is one of the sectors with the biggest

potential in Bhutan and can employ large numbers of youth to help the country recover from the economic shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as many still consider the modern, urban life as more desirable, it is unclear how many youths perceive this as a genuine future opportunity and how many will choose to leave it behind once opportunities in the city open again. It is thus crucial to facilitate an attitude change and make the rural life economically viable and interesting for youth in the long term.

64. BRECSA aims to target youth based on their needs and uses a range of implementations to increase engagement of youth in the agriculture sector. A special focus will be set on advocacy for agriculture, capacity building, entrepreneurship training, mentoring, improving access to finance and establishing youth activities with direct return.

## **Appendix 1 - Overview of research sites and participants**

### **1. BRECSA (Southern Bhutan)**

<b>#</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>Informant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Dzongkhag</b>	<b>Category</b>
1	02/05/2022	Dargaythang Commercial farm	Farm owner	m	N/A	Sarpang	No youth
2	02/05/2022	Dargaythang Commercial farm	Daughter of owner	f	27	Sarpang	Youth
3	02/05/2022	Crestal Moon Women Group	Daughter of owner	f	29	Sarpang	Youth
4	02/05/2022	PK Organic Farm	Young farmer	f	N/A	Sarpang	Youth
5	02/05/2022	PK Organic Farm	Young farmer	m	22	Sarpang	Youth
6	03/05/2022	Dzongkhag administration	Governor & others	N/A	N/A	Sarpang	Official
7	03/05/2022	Sarpang Central school	12th grade	f	19	Sarpang	Youth
8	03/05/2022	Sarpang Central school	12th grade	f	18	Sarpang	Youth
9	03/05/2022	Sarpang Central school	12th grade	m	20	Sarpang	Youth
10	03/05/2022	Sarpang Central school	12th grade	m	18	Sarpang	Youth
11	03/05/2022	Agriculture Marketing & Cooperative Office (RAMCO), Gelephu	Research team	N/A	N/A	Sarpang	Official

12	04/05/2022	Dzongkhag administration	Governor & others	N/A	N/A	Tsirang	Official
13	04/05/2022	FMCL Bio Company, Athang	Business owner	m	N/A	Tsirang	No youth
14	04/05/2022	FMCL Bio Company, Athang	Youth employee	f	22	Tsirang	Youth
15	04/05/2022	FMCL Bio Company, Athang	Youth employee	f	22	Tsirang	Youth
16	04/05/2022	FMCL Bio Company, Athang	Youth employee	f	23	Tsirang	Youth
17	05/05/2022	Phebtang Farm ("Megafarm")	Business owner	m	N/A	Trongsa	No youth
18	05/05/2022	Phebtang Farm ("Megafarm")	Youth employee	f	25	Trongsa	Youth
19	05/05/2022	Phebtang Farm ("Megafarm")	Youth employee	m	28	Trongsa	Youth
20	05/05/2022	Phebtang Farm ("Megafarm")	Youth employee	m	24	Trongsa	Youth
21	05/05/2022	Phebtang Farm ("Megafarm")	Youth employee	m	30	Trongsa	Youth
22	06/05/2022	Dzongkhag administration	Governor & others	N/A	N/A	Trongsa	Official
23	06/05/2022	FMCL Organic Farm	Business owner	m	N/A	Trongsa	No youth
24	08/05/2022	Farmer Sangay (Social media influencer)	Farmer Sangay	m	N/A	Thimphu	Youth
25	09/05/2022	Ministry of Agriculture	Agricultural advisor & others	N/A	N/A	Thimphu	Official
26	09/05/2022	Loden Foundation	Director	f	N/A	Thimphu	Official
27	10/05/2022	Ministry of Labour	TVET division head	f	N/A	Thimphu	Official
28	10/05/2022	Department of Employment & Entrepreneurship	Program officer	f	N/A	Thimphu	Official
29	10/05/2022	Bhutan Agro Industries	Business owner	m	N/A	Thimphu	No youth

## 2. CARLEP (Eastern Bhutan)

#	Date	Site	Informant	Gender	Age	Gewog	Dzongkhag	Category
1	14/05/2022	Lungtenzampa semi-commercial poultry farm	Business owner	m	33	Samkhar	Trashigang	Youth
2	14/05/2022	Vegetable farm	Youth Lead Farmer	m	32	Bartsham	Trashigang	Youth
3	15/05/2022	Gyelpozhing Sunday Market	Mushroom farmer	m	25	Drepong	Mongar	Youth
4	15/05/2022	Gyelpozhing Sunday Market	Vegetable grower	f	31	Drepong	Mongar	Youth
5	16/05/2022	Women's dairy cooperative	Founding member	f	27	Mongar	Mongar	Youth
6	16/05/2022	Women's dairy cooperative	Founding member	f	26	Mongar	Mongar	Youth
7	16/05/2022	NutriFood Products (Cookie processing)	Founding member	m	28	Mongar	Mongar	Youth
8	16/05/2022	ARDC Wengkhar	CARLEP PD	m	N/A	Mongar	Mongar	Official
9	16/05/2022	ARDC Wengkhar	ARDC PD	m	N/A	Mongar	Mongar	Official
10	16/05/2022	ARDC Wengkhar	Livestock officer	m	N/A	Mongar	Mongar	Official
11	16/05/2022	Fruit nursery	Young farmer / business owner	m	26	Mongar	Mongar	Youth
12	16/05/2022	Marpheng Youth Commercial Farm (pineapple) - LUC (Contract with Agri processor)	Drop-out (virtual)	m	N/A	Kanglung	Trashigang	Youth
13	17/05/2022	Youth cooperative - Thambrang LUC (vegetable farm)	Leader	m	30	Silambi	Mongar	Youth
14	17/05/2022	Youth cooperative - Thambrang LUC (vegetable farm)	Young farmer / founding member	m	23	Silambi	Mongar	Youth
15	17/05/	Youth cooperative -	Young	m	26	Silambi	Mongar	Youth

	2022	Thambrang LUC (vegetable farm)	farmer / founding member					
16	17/05/2022	Community-based AI Technician (CAIT)	Young farmer / business owner	m	23	Saling	Mongar	Youth
17	18/05/2022	Oyster mushroom farm	Young farmer / business owner	m	25	Ngatshang	Mongar	Youth
18	18/05/2022	Nyamaed LUC (poultry)	Main farmer	m	39	Ngatshang	Mongar	No youth
19	18/05/2022	Marpheng Youth Commercial Farm (pineapple) - LUC (Contract with Agri processor)	Founding member	m	32	Kanglung	Trashigang	Youth
20	18/05/2022	Marpheng Youth Commercial Farm (pineapple) - LUC (Contract with Agri processor)	Founding member	m	25	Kanglung	Trashigang	Youth
21	18/05/2022	Marpheng Youth Commercial Farm (pineapple) - LUC (Contract with Agri processor)	Founding member	f	27	Kanglung	Trashigang	Youth

## Appendix 2 - Interview guide

### BRECSA

Target group:

- Potential BRECSA beneficiaries
- Youth defined as young women and men aged 18-35

1. Hard facts about farm/business
2. Opportunities for income generation (on-farm and off-farm)
3. Constraints to income generation (on-farm and off-farm)
4. Personal relationship to farming
5. Aspirations (*Focus on livelihood concerns*)
6. Support required to engage in farming or off-farm enterprises
7. SWOT analysis of engagement in farming
8. Knowledge about/attitude towards nutrition

### CARLEP

Target group:

- Past and current CARLEP beneficiaries



- Youth defined as young women and men aged 18-35

Current beneficiaries:

1. Hard facts about farm/business
2. Challenges and opportunities
3. Attitudes and personal relationship towards farming
4. Attitudes towards nutrition and organic production
5. Vision for Bhutan's future (agriculture sector)
6. Personal aspirations

Past beneficiaries

1. Hard facts about farm/business
2. Challenges/reasons to drop out
3. Attitudes and personal relationship towards farming
4. Vision for Bhutan's future (agriculture sector)
5. Personal aspirations

### Appendix 3 - Contact list

Agency	Position	Name	Email
F.M.C.L. mega farm	Project director	Mr. Jitshen Wangchuk	<a href="mailto:projectdirectorfmcl@gmail.com">projectdirectorfmcl@gmail.com</a>
Ministry of Agriculture	Youth engagement officer	Mr. B.B. Rai	<a href="mailto:raibbo@yahoo.com">raibbo@yahoo.com</a>
Loden foundation	Director	Ms. Tshewang Tashi	<a href="mailto:director@loden.org">director@loden.org</a>
Ministry of Labour, TVET division	Division head	Ms. Tshering Lhamo	<a href="mailto:tlhamo@molhr.gov.bt">tlhamo@molhr.gov.bt</a>
Ministry of Labour, TVET division	Program officer	Ms. Dechen Tshomo	<a href="mailto:dechent@molhr.gov.bt">dechent@molhr.gov.bt</a>
Ministry of Labour, Department of Employment and Entrepreneurship	Program officer	Mr. Dawa Zangmo Tamang	<a href="mailto:dztang@molhr.gov.bt">dztang@molhr.gov.bt</a>