

THE POLICY DEBATE BETWEEN POVERTY REDUCTION AND
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN BHUTAN: A CASE STUDY OF
SHINGKCHAR-GORGAN ROAD IN LHUNTSE DISTRICT

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ลุนซีเป็นหนึ่งในหัวเมืองที่พัฒนาน้อยที่สุดในภาคตะวันออกของภูฏาน มีประชากร 43% ที่อยู่ต่ำกว่าเส้นความยากจน รัฐบาลที่ได้รับการเลือกตั้งตัดสินใจที่จะสร้างถนนสายซิงการ์-กอร์กันที่ผ่านอุทยานแห่งชาติตุมสิงห์ลา (TNP) เพื่อลดระดับความยากจนในขณะเดียวกัน กฎหมายของประเทศและนโยบายที่มีอยู่ห้ามการตัดถนนผ่านอุทยานแห่งชาติและพื้นที่คุ้มครอง ดังนั้น องค์กรพัฒนาเอกชนและผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องได้แสดงความกังวลเกี่ยวกับการตัดสินใจของรัฐบาล

งานวิจัยฉบับนี้ศึกษาระดับลำดับความสำคัญของนโยบายลดความยากจนและนโยบายปกป้องสิ่งแวดล้อมในภูฏานซึ่งผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องได้นำมาเป็นข้อพิจารณาและข้อโต้แย้งในการดำเนินโครงการก่อสร้างถนนซิงการ์-กอร์กัน ข้อมูลที่ใช้ในการศึกษาครั้งนี้ถูกรวบรวมจากแหล่งข้อมูลหลักซึ่งแบ่งออกเป็น 2 ส่วน คือ การวิจัยเอกสารและการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกกับผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้อง ได้แก่ตัวแทนจากองค์กรพัฒนาเอกชนด้านสิ่งแวดล้อม 2 คน ตัวแทนจากหน่วยงานภาครัฐที่รับผิดชอบในการคุ้มครองสิ่งแวดล้อม 2 คน สมาชิกสภาผู้แทนราษฎรและผู้ให้ข้อมูลจากอำเภอลุนซี ซึ่งได้แก่ จาลีและเม็ตส์โอบริบ (ผู้นำท้องถิ่น) และสมาชิกของชุมชนท้องถิ่นผ่านการสนทนากลุ่มและการสัมภาษณ์รายบุคคล

การศึกษานี้พบว่าองค์กรพัฒนาเอกชนและตัวแทนจากหน่วยงานภาครัฐที่มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องมีแนวความคิดที่สอดคล้องกันในการดำเนินโครงการก่อสร้างถนนโดยจำเป็นต้องอาศัยการประเมินผลกระทบสิ่งแวดล้อม นอกจากนี้ การศึกษาพบว่าการมีส่วนร่วมในกระบวนการตัดสินใจในระดับท้องถิ่นนั้นมีมากกว่าในระดับชาติเนื่องจากการแทรกแซงจากองค์กรพัฒนาเอกชน ผลจากการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่าปัญหาความยากจนในภาคตะวันออกของภูฏานมีมากกว่าในภาคตะวันตก และมีหลายอำเภอประสบปัญหาความยากจนที่เลวร้ายยิ่งกว่าอำเภอลุนซี อย่างไรก็ตาม สิ่งแวดล้อมในภูฏานยังคงอยู่ในสภาพที่ดีและพื้นที่กรณียังไม่ถูกคุกคามจนกระทั่งมีการเสนอโครงการสร้างถนนดังกล่าว การโต้เถียงได้เกิดขึ้นเนื่องจากโครงการสร้างถนนเพื่อลดความยากจนได้ละเมิดพระราชบัญญัติอนุรักษ์ป่าไม้ปี 2538 และพระราชบัญญัติปกป้องสิ่งแวดล้อมปี 2550 ซึ่งห้ามไม่ให้มีการก่อสร้างโครงสร้างพื้นฐานในบริเวณเขตอนุรักษ์เพื่อรักษาสีเขียว

ภายหลังจากความไม่ลงรอยกัน ผู้สนับสนุนการก่อสร้างถนน อาทิ รัฐบาลกลางและรัฐบาลท้องถิ่น และผู้คัดค้าน โดยเฉพาะองค์กรพัฒนาเอกชนด้านสิ่งแวดล้อมได้ประนีประนอมกันโดยการทำการประเมินผลกระทบด้านสิ่งแวดล้อมร่วมกัน การศึกษานี้สรุปได้ว่าองค์กรพัฒนาเอกชนในระดับท้องถิ่นและระดับชาติในภาพรวมนั้นมีแนวโน้มที่จะเลือกวิธีการพัฒนาเพื่อส่งเสริมการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนของประเทศ งานวิจัยฉบับนี้มีข้อเสนอแนะให้องค์กรพัฒนาเอกชน หน่วยงานภาครัฐและผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องในระดับท้องถิ่นและระดับชาติควรพิจารณาหารือร่วมกันเพื่อกำหนดมาตรการและกลยุทธ์ที่สอดคล้องกับเป้าหมายในการอนุรักษ์สิ่งแวดล้อมและการลดปัญหาความยากจน และส่งเสริมการตัดสินใจที่เป็นกลางและโปร่งใสต่อผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องทั้งหมด

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KEYWORDS; POLICY DEBATE, POVERTY REDUCTION, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, NGOS, BHUTAN, LHUNTSE DISTRICT, SHINGKCHAR GORGAN ROAD

TASHI PENJOR, B.A: THE POLICY DEBATE BETWEEN POVERTY REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN BHUTAN: A CASE STUDY OF SHINGKCHAR-GORGAN ROAD IN LHUNTSE DISTRICT. THESIS ADVISOR: CARL NIGEL MIDDLETON, Ph.D.,101 pp.

Lhunste is one of the least developed districts in the eastern part of Bhutan with 43% of population below poverty line. The elected government decided to construct the Shingkhhar-Gorgan road which passes through Thrumshingla National Park (TNP) to reduce poverty. However, the country's existing laws and policies prohibit roads passing through national parks and protected areas. Therefore, NGOs and other concerned stakeholders have raised concerns towards the government's decision. This thesis examines the competing policy priorities between poverty reduction and environmental protection in Bhutan in which the Shingkhhar-Gorgan road is being debated and acted upon by various concerned stakeholders. The information used in the study was collected from two main sources: documentary research; and in-depth focus-group and individual interviews with key informants, including two environmental NGOs, two government stakeholders responsible for environmental protection, a Member of Parliament, and informants from Lhuntse District it includes Jarey, Metsho and Menbi Gups (local leaders) and residents in Gorgan.

The study finds that local governance participation in the decision making process is stronger and face lesser challenges compare to the national level due to NGOs' intervention. In addition, the study finds that poverty in the eastern part of Bhutan is greater compared to the western area of Bhutan. At the same time, the current environmental condition throughout Bhutan is still good, while the case study area had not been under threat until the road project was proposed. The main debate has arisen as the proposed road, promoted for poverty reduction, violates the Forest and Conservation Act 1995 and Environment Protection Act 2007, which prohibit infrastructure construction in Protected Areas to conserve the environment.

Stakeholders in support of the road, including the local and national government, and stakeholders opposing the road, in particular the environmental NGOs, after a period of disagreement agreed to compromise on a joint Environmental Impact Assessment. Building on this, the study recommends that these stakeholders at local and national levels should cooperate and discuss with one another to establish measures and strategies that meet both environmental conservation goals and poverty reduction goals as well as promote fair and transparent decision making.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	:	Asian Development Bank
BLSS	:	Bhutan Living Standard Survey
CGI	:	Corrugated Galvanized Iron Sheet
DT	:	Dzongkhag Tshodue
DOR	:	Department of Road
DOFPS	:	Department of Forest and Park Services
EAA	:	Environment Assessment Act
EAD	:	Environment Assessment Division
EIA	:	Environment Impact Assessment
GNH	:	Gross National Happiness
GDP	:	Gross Domestic Product
ICDP	:	Integrated Conservation Development Programme
MDG	:	Millennium Development Goal
MP	:	Member of Parliament
MOWHS	:	Ministry of Works and Human Settlement
NA	:	National Assembly
NC	:	National Council
NGO	:	Non-government Organization
NEC	:	National Environment Commission
NSB	:	National Statistical Bureau
PAR	:	Poverty Analysis Report
PHCB	:	Population and Housing Census of Bhutan

PPIM	:	Participatory Policy Impact and Assessment
RGBOB	:	Royal Government of Bhutan
RSPN	:	Royal Society of Protection for Nature
SAE	:	Small Area Estimation
TNP	:	Thrumshingla National Park
TRC	:	Tiger Conference
UN	:	United Nation
UNDP	:	United Nations Development Program
WB	:	World Bank
WCED	:	World Commission on Environment and Development
WRI	:	World Resources Institute
WWF	:	World Wildlife Fund

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Bhutan began to experience fast development after the establishment of local governance at the district level, called Dzongkhag Tshogdue¹ (DT), and at the block level, called Gewog Tshogde² (GT), in 1981 and 1991 respectively. People were given an opportunity to participate in the decision making of development activities in their own region. It was found that there was much impact on poverty reduction in the community through the construction of roads to many dzongkhags and gewogs. Automobile access to every gewog center has been identified as one of the core development themes in the Royal Government's Tenth Five Year Plan (2008-2013), with poverty to be mainstreamed into all development initiatives along with the implementation of targeted sustainable livelihoods interventions. Both the local governance of GT and DT supported a proposed road from Shingkhar in Bumthang district to Gorgan in Lhunste district(Shingkhar-Gorgan road).

A Poverty Analysis Report (PAR), (2007) showed that Bhutan still had 23.2% of population below poverty line. Bhutan's five eastern districts, namely Zhemgang, Samtse, Monggar, Lhuntse and Samdrupjongkhar, suffered from the highest incidence of income poverty, with levels ranging from 52.9% to 38%. The high poverty in the eastern region, particularly Lhuntse district, was a top priority for the government's poverty reduction.

Thrumshingla National Park (TNP) is one of the 10 protected areas of Bhutan and was gazetted in 1998. It is located in the central part of Bhutan and contains spectacular mountains with a rich cultural and biological diversity. It spreads over these four districts of Bumthang, Monggar, Zhemgang and Lhunste where there are examples of all the different vegetation zones within Bhutan. It is a prime habitat for red pandas, tigers and

¹ District Council

² Block Committee

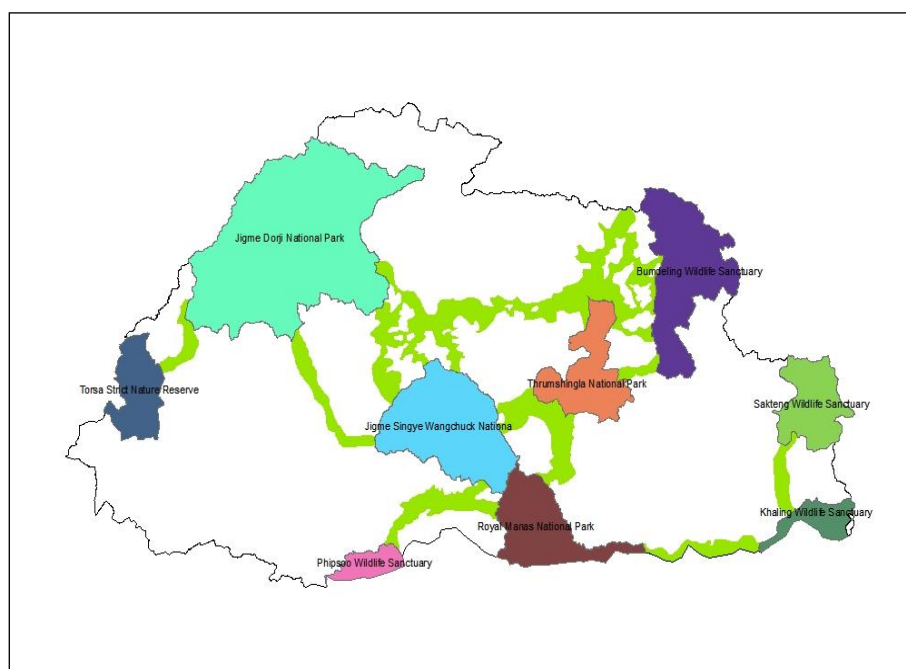
hundreds of mammals and species. Three-fourths of Lhuntse falls either in Thrumshingla National Park (TNP), Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary (BWS), or in the Biological Corridors connecting the two protected areas. Compared to all other Dzongkhags, Lhuntse has the highest area under biological corridor management.

The proposed Shingkar-Gorgan road starts from Shingkar in Bumthang district and then connects to various deep isolated rural villages of Lhuntse district. These villages include Phephu Goenpa, Zhongmaey, Ungor, Gortshom and Gorgan in Metsho Gewog. There are more than 190 households in these districts to benefit from the road, with potential benefit to many more households in other eastern districts if the road is extended further.

This road has become a contended political issue where some stakeholders have defended the need for the road whilst others have opposed it. Both sides have tried to grab an opportunity within the democratic process through policy debate. The initial approval process of the road represents the outcome of the policy debate from grass root level discussions at the GT and DT levels to the highest decision making body of the country in the national assembly. At the same time, NGOs have also raised concerns about the need to follow the laws as the road was in contravention of the Environment Protection Act 2007 and the Forest and Conservation Act 1995, as it passes through the core area of Thrumshingla National Park. Furthermore, Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) policy includes environmental protection as one of the pillars strictly implemented on the policies of the government. The above laws state that no such development activities can pass through national parks and protected areas. Despite this, the road was deliberated in the summer of the 7th session of the National Assembly (NA), and was approved by the cabinet in 2011. Having been approved by the Cabinet, the road construction in Gorgan was started in November 2011, but was then suspended shortly after the inauguration of the project in Gorgan. The project's suspension was mainly due to the intervention of NGOs against the road.

At present, the road from Selibi to Pephu Goenpa, which is about 12 km outside of the core zone area in Metsho gewog is under construction, whilst the road inside the core zone is suspended.

Figure 1.1 Protected Areas of Bhutan



The differing priorities between environmentalists and the government have delayed the completion of the Shingkar-Gorgan road construction. As a democratic country, the government needs to take both perspectives into consideration. The Bhutan Broadcasting Service organized a live debate on television in which viewers in the country voted for or against the road in September 2011. The media poll showed the results of the ‘Vote for Shingkar-Gorgan road must be constructed.’ There were 3,145 Yes and 2,143 No answers. There may be different opinions between the public in the capital and the local people, and NGOs still feel that, despite the poll results, environmental protection should be the top priority as the poll difference in the media does not indicate a landmark victory.

The NGOs who were standing to take up the role of environmental protectors were:

- The Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN) was founded as a citizen based non-profit organization in 1987. The RSPN focuses primarily on environmental conservation and a sustainable livestock programme that seeks to strengthen linkage between the environment and the economic welfare of communities through environment-friendly livelihood options.
- The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) - Bhutan began its conservation work in 1977 by providing training opportunities for the Bhutanese nationals. They focused on immediate conservation needs, such as establishing and managing a system of protected areas, direct species conservation, developing the nation's capacity to manage its natural resources by strengthening relevant institutions, and promoting conservation education and public awareness. At the same time, regarding the conservation of environment, a total of Nu.113.76 million³ was allocated for the ongoing Integrated Conservation Development Program (ICDPs) initiated by the World Wildlife Fund-Bhutan, and a large portion of the budget was channeled to fund the TNP.

Lily Wangchuk⁴ (2010), a former diplomat and Assistant Resident Representative for UNDP in Bhutan, writes '...that the country has placed environmental conservation at the core of its development strategy and is treated as a set of concerns that must be mainstreamed in its overall approach to development planning and must be strengthened by law. The first modern legislation enacted in 1969 was replaced by the Forest and Nature Conservation Act, 1995 which is specifically aimed at protecting the country's forests and wildlife. Since then many laws enacted are directly or indirectly related to the conservation of the environment' (p.238).

³ One US Dollar is equal to Ngultrum (Nu)56.25 as of July, 2012

⁴ Lily Wangchuk is the author of 'Facts of Bhutan: The Land of the Thunder Dragon'. She won the Lions Club Award for her contributions towards strengthening the India-Bhutan relations. She has written numerous research papers and publications related to Bhutan, including 'Window on Bhutan' and 'Bhutan in Focus' published by Indian Embassy, New Delhi.

Furthermore, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan in article 5 section 3 states, ‘the Government shall ensure that, in order to conserve the country’s natural resources and to prevent degradation of the ecosystem, a minimum of sixty percent of Bhutan’s total land shall be maintained under forest cover for all time’ (p.11). The National Environment Commission and Department of Forest Park Services are government stakeholders who play a vital role as a check and balance between environmental protection and socio-economic development.

On the other hand, in a Press Release dated August 22, 2011, the Prime Minister responded to the NGOs and media that opposed the Shingkhar-Gorgan road by stating that “the government still does not have enough evidence of the tiger population in Thrumshingla National Park (TNP) whether it will actually decrease or its core habitat will be disturbed by the road construction, but there is enough evidence that if the road is not built, people of Lhuntse will sink deeper and deeper into poverty.”

In this case, the result of the decentralization policy from National Assembly (NA) to the block level (GT) to support the Shingkhar-Gorgan road is being under further investigation due to the NGOs intervention since it could undermine the strength of local and central government elected by the people through democratic process. The elected body has a commitment to achieve what they had promised to the public. Therefore, in order to determine whether the outcome of this approach will be successful, it is important to further study Bhutan’s policy in terms of reducing the poverty and protecting the environment with consultation with all stakeholders/NGOs at the local and the national level, and to consider whether it will strengthen the laws and policies without any violation. By undertaking this research, there is hope to uncover new and useful information about how various stakeholders have been involved in the policy debate process in Bhutan.

1.2 Research Questions

This research will attempt to answer the following main question:

- How have the competing policy priorities of poverty reduction and environmental protection been presented, debated and acted upon by the key stakeholders?

The following sub-research questions are developed to answer the main research question.

- 1 Which stakeholders support the development of the Shingkar-Gorgan road? How do they explain their viewpoint? And what actions have they taken to promote their viewpoint?
- 2 Which stakeholders oppose the development of the Shingkar-Gorgan road? How do they explain their viewpoint? And what actions have they taken to promote their viewpoint?

1.3 Objectives of Research

To respond to the main research question, the following main research objective is proposed:

- To evaluate how the competing policy priorities of poverty reduction and environmental protection been presented, debated and acted upon by the key stakeholders.

The sub-objectives of this study are:

- 1 To determine which stakeholders support the development of the Shingkar-Gorgan road, how they explain their viewpoint, and what actions they have taken to promote their viewpoint.

- 2 To determine which stakeholders oppose the development of the Shingkhar-Gorgan road, how they explain their viewpoint, and what actions they have taken to promote their viewpoint.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

Since there is a connection between road development, poverty reduction and environmental conservation in Bhutan, the debates on three main concepts, poverty, environment and public policy, are used in this thesis and are detailed in the following sections.

1.4.1 Poverty in Bhutan

Bhutan's eastern region contributes largely towards the national poverty rate of 23.2%. The present criteria of poverty measurement is borrowed from Nepal and applied to estimating the magnitude of poverty in Bhutan, as Nepal shares similar geographical conditions. The poverty line in Bhutan is identified on the basis of the minimum food calorie intake requirement of 2124 kg calorie per person per day. The Poverty Analysis Report 2007 found that poverty is exclusively a rural phenomenon, where farmers may not require the actual cash amount of Nu.1097⁵ per month to buy the above calorie of food as they depend partially on agriculture and livestock, and they grow some of their own food. There is little reservation on methodological flaws, as the food calorie requirement may not be the same when it comes to rural and urban people. A farmer on the field requires more food energy than a civil servant due to differences between physical works undertaken.

According to UNDP (1994:25-26), economic security is simply defined as the condition in which a person or a community has a stable income and other social and non-monetary sources or resources as income to support a current and future living standard. One of the main economic securities in the community can be measured by

⁵The Gross National Happiness Commission sets up this amount of money to buy food with minimum calories per person per month.

looking at the community through, 'basic daily household income from both formal and informal work.

From the statement of Food and Agriculture Organization (1996), the definition of 'food security' widely used is "food security exists when all people at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. In the case of the Shinghar-Gorgan road, and with regard to economic access, in Lhuntse, there is presently limited access to development support including access to economic goods through the use of road.

1.4.2 Environment Protection

The Constitution of Bhutan, the Forest and Nature Conservation Act (1995), and the National Environment Protection Act (2007), contained articles that act as barriers to the Shinghar-Gorgan road development, because once the area is identified as a national park or biological area for species, the Environment Commission requires an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) at the site to be submitted to the central government.

The National Environment Protection Act, 2007 Chapter V (68) under the Forest Coverage, Protected Areas and Vulnerable Ecosystems article states that, 'in order to conserve the country's natural resources and to prevent degradation of the fragile mountain ecosystem, a minimum of sixty percent of Bhutan's total land shall be maintained under forest cover for all time. Any changes in the present national forest cover and protected areas shall be made only by the Parliament.' Bhutan, now has changed into a democratic constitutional monarchy from absolute monarchy, so the priorities has been given to democratic decision-making process with high regard in any matter, including the present controversial issues on poverty and environmental policies.

Chapter VII (86) of the National Environment Protection Act, 2007 under the Right to Environmental Information and Citizen's Participation states 'Citizens are entitled to participate in decision-making processes concerning the environment, when the Government deems appropriate to hold public consultations on, including a) Contributing views during the process of drawing up policies, plans and project formulation and implementation.' Chapter III section (20) also says 'the National Environment Commission (NEC) shall be an independent authority and the highest decision making body on all matters relating to the environment and its management in the country. Section 21(c) includes three representatives of civil society/eminant persons as one of the member in the commission.

So these laws and policies have given the legitimacy to the NGOs and the public to raise their issues against the road construction to protect the environment of the nation.

1.4.3 Policy Debate Process in Bhutan

Bhutan is now transferred formally to Democratic Constitutional Monarchy after the historic election in 2008 with three branches of government divided into the executive branch, the legislative branch and the judicial branch. The man who scripted democracy after more than three decades in power, His majesty the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, decided to abdicate his position to welcome a democratically elected government.

1.4.3.1 National Assembly

The National Assembly (NA) or the lower house is a Parliament institution composed of two political parties, the government and the opposition. The NA has forty seven members representing twenty districts based on the population from each constituency. The Prime Minister and the Speaker are the heads of the executive and legislative branches respectively. The NA serves a five year term. The Speaker from the ruling government will chair the session.

The Parliament discuss and debate on agendas submitted by the local governance of DT and GT. With regard to the bills, they can originate in both houses, but financial bills can only originate in the NA. The executive ministers are accountable to the parliamentarians and they are also required to be present and report to National Council (NC) separately in their question answer session.

Another Parliamentary institution is National Council or the (upper house) which has been elected for a five year term. The Article 11 of the National Council section (1) of The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan states:

1. The National Council shall consist of twenty-five members comprising of:
 - (a) One member elected by the voters in each of the twenty Dzongkhags; and
 - (b) Five eminent persons nominated by the Druk Gyalpo⁶.

They are in a political institution and are not eligible to become a National Assembly member or local government officer at the same time. The Council is chaired by the Chairperson/Deputy Chairperson which is elected among the members. The Parliament House consists of the King, the National Council and the National Assembly. Both houses will assemble at least twice a year. Lhuntse district has two NA members and one Council member.

1.4.3.2 Local Governance

In 1981, Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogdue (DYT), now known as Dzongkhag Tshogdue (DT), was established with all members elected by the people of their respective dzongkhags. The DT is the highest decision-making body at the dzongkhag level and the central government has no authority to draft plan for the local government. The DT session, held twice a year, discusses their own planning activities; debates on priorities based on the decentralization policy, and submits their resolutions to the central government for approval. The DT Chairperson seeks only specific advice from the

⁶King of Bhutan

district governor and civil servants on central government policies, budgeting, rules and regulations of the laws; however, they have no direct authority to interfere in the decision making process since the members are elected and directly accountable to the people.

The Gewog Yargay Tshogchung (GYT), now known as Gewog Tshogde (GT), established in 1991, further delegates the power of decision-making to the grass root community at the block level. At the lowest level, the GT members are representatives of the village and they discussed people's choices of various developmental activities in the GT session. Here, the communities themselves participate in planning development activities and discuss the issues in the GT session. In the approval process, the Shingkhar-Gorgan road was discussed at the GT level and then the solution was submitted to the DT.

1.4.3.3 NGOs in Bhutan

The term "non-governmental organization" only came into popular use globally with the establishment of the United Nations Organization in 1945 with provisions in Article 71 of Chapter 10 of the United Nations Charter for a consultative role for organizations which are neither governments nor member states. The definition of "international NGO" (INGO) is first given in resolution 288 (X) of ECOSOC on February 27, 1950: it is defined as "any international organization that is not founded by an international treaty".

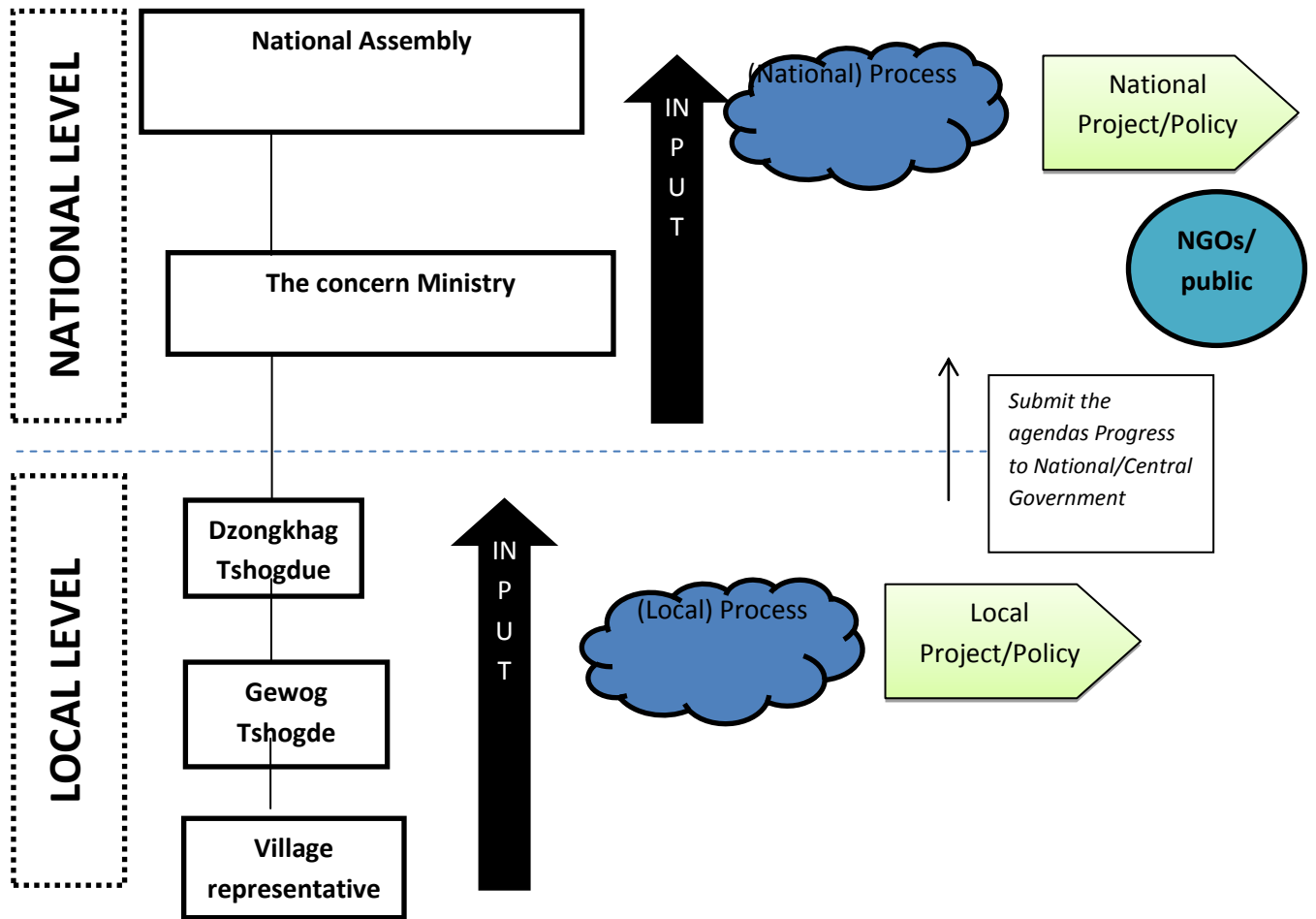
The World Bank classifies NGOs as either operational NGOs, which are primarily concerned with development projects, or advocacy NGOs, which are primarily concerned with promoting a cause. In recent times, NGOs' role in environmental advocacy have gained popularity world-wide. The term non-governmental organizations(NGOs) is usually referred to as "non-state, non-profit orientated groups who pursue purposes of public interest", excluding the private sector (Schmidt/Take 1997).

An environmental NGO, 'is an organization that is non-governmental and non-profit-making and engaged with an environmental problem or problems.' Environmental NGOs are part of such political contexts and engage in advocacy work to try to change policies that they perceived as damaging to the environment (Blowers, 2003:26). It is widely assumed that NGOs have more opportunities to be influential when operating in more democratic political structures. Such structures shape NGO advocacy work and in some countries with more authoritarian forms of rule, NGO may have much tougher time influencing environmental policy. Similarly, NGOs in Bhutan also faces challenges from the competing policy priorities of poverty reduction and environmental protection.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN) was founded as a citizen based non-profit organization in 1987. The RSPN focuses primarily on environmental conservation and a sustainable livestock programme that seeks to strengthen linkage between the environment and the economic welfare of communities through environment-friendly livelihood options. The vision of our organization is that the Future generations of Bhutan will live in an environmentally sustainable society. RSPN's mission is to inspire personal responsibility and active involvement of the people of Bhutan in the conservation of the Kingdom's environment through education, research and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) - Bhutan began its conservation work in 1977 by providing training opportunities for the Bhutanese nationals. They focused on immediate conservation needs, such as establishing and managing a system of protected areas, direct species conservation, developing the nation's capacity to manage its natural resources by strengthening relevant institutions, and promoting conservation education and public awareness. At the same time, regarding the conservation of environment, a total of Nu.113.76 million was allocated for the ongoing Integrated Conservation Development Program (ICDPs) initiated by the World Wildlife Fund-Bhutan, and a large portion of the budget was channeled to fund the TNP. These two NGOs mainly receive funds from international agency around the world.

Figure 1.2 Decision Making Process from Local Level to Central Level.



1.5 Research Methodology

The research was qualitative in nature, relying principally on primary data and some basic secondary data. There were two main sources of data. The first sources were published books, research papers, journals, government documents, newspaper articles, as well as websites on the subject of environmental protection and poverty reduction. The second sources were individual interviews, in-depth interviews and one small focus group discussion conducted in Lhunste.

The researcher spent a total of 29 days (June 6, 2012- July 5, 2012) conducting field work in Bhutan. Out of 29 days, 27 days were engaged on the actual field research. All data and information was collected independently by the researcher. In total 11 in-depth interviews, 2 individual interviews and one focus group discussion were conducted.

1.5.1 Research Interviews Conducted in Thimphu

During my research time (June 2012), both the NC and NA members were engaged with the summer session. The researcher approached the NC members after learning that their session was only held until noon on that particular day, whereas the MPs from the NA still continued their session until evening. Although, the NC does not represent the government, both the NA and the NC can be referred as the MP elected by the people. The NC was interviewed with questions concerning the three frameworks of my research: environmental protection, poverty reduction and policy debate/democracy institution. Table 1.1 summarizes the in-depth interviews in Thimphu, Bhutan's capital city.

Table 1.1(a) Summary of in-depth interview in Thimphu.

Name /organization	Date	Type of interview
Mr. Mincha Wangdi Chief Programme Officer (WWF-Bhutan)	7/6/2012	In-depth interview
Mr. Tandin Wangdi Sr. Programme Officer (WWF-Bhutan)	9/6/2012	In-depth interview
Ms. Rebecca Pradhan Ecologist (RSPN)	11/6/2012	In-depth interview
Mr. Sonam Wangchuk Chief Forest Officer, (DOFPS) Ministry of Agriculture and Forest	12/6/2012	In-depth interview
Mr. Lhendup Tharchen Forest officer (DOFPS) Ministry of Agriculture and Forest	13/6/2012	In-depth interview
Mr. Karma C Nyedrup Chief Environment Officer Environment Assessment Division National Environment Commission (NEC)	14/6/2012	In-depth interview
Mr. Rinzin Rinzin Member of Parliament(NC)	16/6/2012	In-depth interview

1.5.2 Research interviews Conducted in Lhunste Dzongkhag

After arriving in Lhuntse, dzongkhag's statistical officer helped me arrange appointments with the local leaders of Menbi, Jarey and Metsho gewog, as well as a few individuals who were visiting the district. The GT Chairperson of Metsho gewog asked one of his village representatives through his phone to gather in Gorgan shop for a focus group discussion.

Table 1.1(b) Summary of indepth interview in Lhuntse.

Name/ Organization	Date	Type of interview
Mr. Karma Thinley Dzongkhag Statistical Officer, Lhuntse	19/6/2012	In-depth Interview
Mr. Kinzang Jurme DT Chairperson, Lhuentse Dzongkhag	20/6/2012	In-depth Interview
Mr. Jamtsho Dorji GT Chairperson, Menbi Gewog	21/6/2012	In-depth Interview
Mr. Tshering Samdrup GT Chairperson, Metsho Gewog	22/6/2102	In-depth Interview
Mr. Dorji, Gorgan Shopkeeper	23/6/2012	Individual Interview
Gorgan Shop	26/6/2012	Focus Group Discussion

There were 16 participants, including the GT Chairperson himself and the statistical officer, in the focus group discussion. The other participants were two shop owners, 11 villagers from Metsho gewog and a village representative from Gorgan.

1.5.3 Data Treatment and Translation

After the data and information was collected from the informants, the researcher then entered and made a record with Microsoft Word to keep the data collected in an organized and safe manner. The data presented in this thesis is in a narrative form, with quotes from individuals and descriptions of the key issues and trends identified, and analyzed according to the conceptual framework. The findings of this research are discussed and interpreted in accordance with the research objectives and the conceptual framework.

1.6 Research Limitations

Within the short span of time in Lhuntse, the researcher could not conduct a big focus group discussion. It took two days from the capital, Thimphu, to reach Lhuntse dzongkhag. After arriving in Lhuntse, people were busy with summer cultivation. So this limitation in the methodology may not be in a position to come up with concrete and precise conclusions on the institution of local governance support towards road construction and may not represent the whole public of Lhunste dzongkhag.

1.7 Ethical Consideration.

This study required direct information collection from two places, Thimphu and Lhuntse. All participants were informed of the broad aims and purposes of this research and the researcher had sought verbal and written consent from the interviewees. The researcher ensured that the individuals and informants participated and selected in this study had been treated with respect and sensitivity. The researcher's ethics and honesty were highly valued, and the information collected in all cases and situations were purposefully used only for this academic research. To respect the rights of the informants,

the researcher made sure that all informants voluntarily consent to participate in the interviews.

1.8 Significance of the Research

The Shinghar-Gorgan road was reported by the media as a controversial road project because of the conflicts between poverty reduction policy and environmental conservation policy. It was hoped that this research would provide useful and practical knowledge as to how to pursue public policy debate in which various stakeholders such as NGOs, GT and DT, MP and the public played their roles along with the government towards achieving both environmental protection and poverty reduction. This study intended to benefit policy makers, local governance of GT and DT, students, the public and NGOs, especially the concerned organizations that look after and deal with the issue of environmental protection and developmental activities among the developing nations in the world.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section reviews related literature on the three key concepts of the thesis, including poverty in Bhutan, environmental protection and the government's decision-making policy at different levels. The Shingkhar-Gorgan road is used as a case study in which its policy debate process is a challenge to environmental policies, NGOs and the public. This epitomizes the dilemma in Bhutan's development between maintaining poverty reduction and environmental protection.

The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan lies sandwiched between two giant neighbors, China to the north and India to the south, east and west. This small landlocked nation with its rugged terrain and scattered rural settlements occupies a land area of 38,394sq. km, with an estimated population of 634,982 spread unevenly across twenty districts. Bhutan is one of the least populated and least developed countries in Asia. About 70 percent of the people live in rural areas. Although major parts of the country are well connected by a good road network, more than half of the population still has to walk several hours to reach the nearest road. Bhutan's economic growth depends heavily on its agriculture with livestock and farming as the main source of livelihood in rural Bhutan.

Today, the export of hydro-power to India and tourism are the two highest revenue earners, where Bhutan's GDP per capita was USD 1,852 but one of the fastest growing economies in South Asia. In the same year, the GDP contribution from the energy sector was 19.1% and the revenue contribution from the electricity sector alone was 42% of the national revenue (Wangchuk, 2010:220). According to the World Bank's 2011 Bhutan Economic Update, the average rate of GDP growth had been 8.2 percent per year since 2004-05, and 9-10 percent per year during 2010-2011.

Bhutan became a democratic constitutional monarchy consisting of an Executive, Legislative and Judiciary branches after adopting its first written Constitution on 18 July, 2008. In an address to the nation, the fourth King stated 'After 26 years of the process of

decentralization and devolution of power to the people, I have every confidence that our people will be able to choose the best political party that can provide good governance and serve the interest of the nation. I would like our people to know that a system of parliamentary democracy will take place in 2008.’ (Fourth King Jigme Singye Wanchuck, December 17, 2005). It was a remarkable transition to democracy which was unlike many other countries where it was often achieved with bloody rebellions and warfare. In Bhutan, it was initiated from the throne itself.

2.2 Environment in Bhutan

Bhutan belongs to the eastern Himalayas which forms part of the ten global biodiversity ‘hotspots’ in the world and one of the 221 global endemic bird areas. Almost three fourths of the land is covered by forests of alpine, temperate and sub-tropical species that are a natural habitat for diversity of flora and fauna (Wangchuk,2010:337). Considering its size, Bhutan probably has the greatest biodiversity among Asian countries. Bhutan has placed environmental conservation at the center of its development strategy as one of the four pillars of GNH. The country has received international acclaim for its commitment to the maintenance of this biodiversity, reflected in its decision to maintain at least 60% of the land under forest cover for all time to come and designate about half (51%) of its territory as protected areas, including strict nature reserves, nature and parks, wildlife sanctuary, biological corridors and conservation areas.

About 9 percent of the country has been declared as biological corridors in which wildlife sanctuaries and a chain of nature reserves connect to the protected areas to ensure that the wild animals and birds can move freely within a vast natural range. The corridors form a “Gift to the Earth” from the people of Bhutan. Thrumshingla National Park (TNP) is one of the 10 protected areas included in the nation’s list. Six species of globally threatened birds are found here: Rufous-necked Hornbill (*Aceros nipalensis*), Rufous-throated Wren-babbler (*Spelaeomis caudatus*), Satyr Tragopan (*Tragopan satyra*),

Beautiful Nuthatch (*Sitta formosa*), Ward's Trogon (*Harpactes ward*) and Chestnut-breasted Partridge (*Aroborphila mandellii*). The Wedge-billed Wren-babbler (*Spencichla humei*) was also recently discovered here. Thrumshingla National Park has spectacular scenic views, including beautiful forests from alpine to sub-tropical broadleaf types.

Article 5 (1) of the Constitution states that 'it is the fundamental duty of every citizen to contribute to the protection of the natural environment, conservation of the rich biodiversity of Bhutan and prevention of all forms of ecological degradation including noise, visual and physical pollution through the adoption and support of environment friendly practices and policies.'

The Forest and Conservation Act 1969 and National Forest Policy 1974 were two of the country's early legislation and policy statements which provided the legal and policy framework for successful conservation efforts. The Act of 1969 has been replaced by the Nature Conservation and Forest Act in 1995. Chapter III of the Forest and Nature Conservation Act, 1995, with reference to government reserved forest, explains that '(ix) constructing or placing any permanent or temporary structure, fence, marker or other device; (x) destroying, damaging, defacing or otherwise interfering with any structure, fence, marker, dam or anything else constructed, placed or planted is prohibited.'

Yet, the process of deforestation is perhaps the world's most significant symptom of unsustainability. The World Resources Institute (1998) estimates that by as early as the mid 1990's the Earth's forest cover was only over half of what it was in pre-agriculture times, while the amount of undisturbed, primary forest was only about a fifth of the original amount. Thailand's forest cover between 1961 and 1998 plummeted from 55 percent to 28 percent (Ekins, 2002). Between 1990 and 1995, deforestation rates in developing countries averaged a shocking 13.7 million ha per year (WRI, 1998).

According to the latest land use survey in Bhutan, conducted by the Land Use Statistical Section (LUSS), the Ministry of Agriculture, based on the analysis of 1994 satellite data, the country's total area under forests was 29,045 sq. km or 72.5% of the country. At present, land use changes are minimal, but there is some amount of forest degradation every year, which will go on adding to the existing 3,258 sq. km of degraded scrub forests spread over 20 dzongkhags (Ministry of Agriculture 1996a).

2.3 Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure development, largely the transport sector, is greatly responsible for the loss of forests in a variety of ways. First, road construction requires the minimum clearance of trees, but often many more trees are cut down. In addition to the loss of forest plants, the current rate of species extinction is also on an unprecedented scale. As the World Bank (1992) notes, "The complex web of interactions that sustains the vitality of ecosystems can unravel even if only a small number of key species disappear (p. 59)." Infrastructure development brings about species extinction much in the same way that it causes deforestation by opening up previously inaccessible areas for human expansion. Road expansion exposes wildlife populations to trade in meat and animal products that accompany such projects.

However, the lack of such infrastructure facilities is considered to be a major structural weakness that can hold back economic growth and development, while the lack of access to such facilities is generally a key dimension in any definition of poverty (UNESCAP, 2006).

In many countries, markets are fragmented by poor infrastructure connections. Consequently, markets with poor infrastructure can only manage supply and demand within a restricted geographic area. This lack of coordination leads to a distortedly high cost of transporting goods as well as more expensive service provision, and this in turn becomes a barrier to trade and investment (Ali & Yao, 2004). Economists Ali and Yao

(2004) argue that the expansion of well-connected and integrated market system should “improve access to markets, products, inputs and other services, thus reducing transportation and transaction costs and facilitating exchange (p.5).”

So the infrastructure development can have both positive and negative impacts, while sustainable development tries to bring a neutral and balanced development.

2.4 Poverty Definition in Bhutan

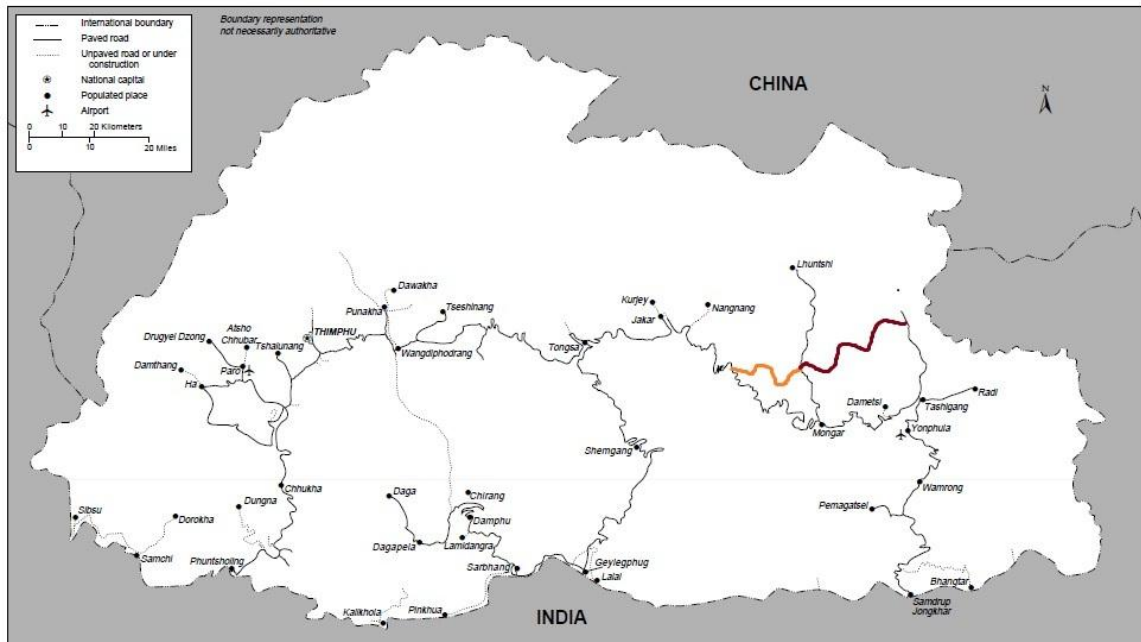
Bhutan is the least developed country, and its economy is essentially an agrarian one with 79 percent of the people dependent on agriculture and livestock rearing for their livelihood. Bhutan embarked on its first development initiative with the inception of the first five-year plan in 1961. Prior to this, a vast majority of Bhutanese lived rugged lives of isolation. However, Bhutan has undergone major transformation and there has been remarkable improvement in all aspects of the lives of Bhutanese people.

In 2000 the first poverty estimate was made through the Household Income and Expenditure survey, which was followed by two rounds of Bhutan Living Standard Survey (BLSS) in 2004 and 2007. The poverty rate in 2000 was found to be at 36%, which gradually declined to 23.2% in 2007, that approximately 146,000 were below the poverty line. It was estimated that average life expectancy was about 66 years (National Statistics Bureau, 2004). The Poverty Analysis Report (PAR) 2007 found that about one-fourth of the country’s population was estimated to be poor. It also showed that poverty rates were high in Zhemgang, Samtse, Monggar, Samdrupjongkhar and Lhuntse districts.

Bhutan is divided into three regions based on the number of households and their geographic location; namely Western, Central and Eastern. The Shingkahr-Gorgan road development will benefit the entire eastern region of Bhutan by shortening the distance mostly to Lhuntse. If the Shingkar-Gorgan road is not constructed, travelers to Lhuntse

and Trashi Yangtse districts from the west have to first travel down to Monggar district. From there, they have to travel north (Figure 2.1). A further road extension could subsequently benefit other districts, namely Tashigang, Monggar, TrashiYangtse, and Samdrup Jongkhar districts.

Figure 2.1: National Road Connecting 20 districts in Bhutan

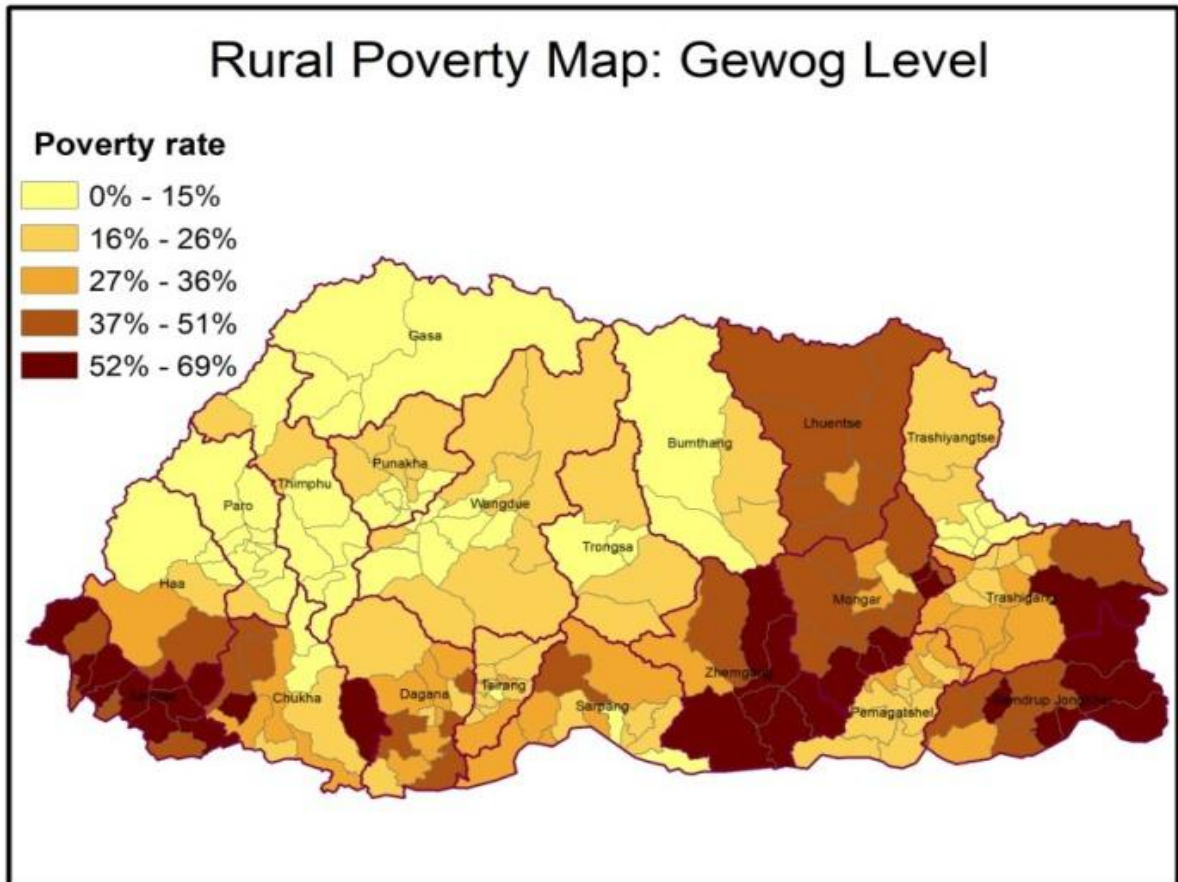


Source: Department of Roads, Ministry of Works and Human Settlement, 2009

The Small Area Estimation (SAE) of Poverty in Rural Bhutan provides a more disaggregated picture of poverty in Bhutan down to the grass root level, which is based on the Bhutan Living Standard Survey (BLSS) 2007 and Population & Housing Census of Bhutan (PHCB) 2005. This analysis was carried out by the National Statistics Bureau (NSB) and the World Bank in 2010 in response to the emerging need of the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) especially to allocate the effective resources in all the

gewogs (blocks) that have been affected by poverty. Figure 2.2 shows that most of the poverty is located in the eastern region of Bhutan.

Figure 2.2 Rural Poverty Map at the Gewog level.



Source: National Statistical Bureau (NSB) and World Bank, 2010

Even when there are many large markets and cities, if the villages are very far away from the existing road, the village's poor accessibility to market may not reduce the poverty in the village. On the other hand, even when there is only one medium-sized market, if a village is located near the road, the villagers will have better access to the

market. For example, the areas in western Bhutan are highly connected to markets and also have the lowest poverty levels.

The level of poverty in Lhunste can be further explained with the table below. The condition of house roof in percentage wise shows that 20.6% households in Lhunste still use bamboo roof and 0.2% use straw with 43% population below total poverty line and 32.2% of households below total poverty line.

Table 2.1 Poverty, Ratio and Housing Condition in Lhunste, 2005 & 2007

Sl.no	Details	2005	2007
1	Poverty condition		
1.1	Population below total poverty line (%)*		43.0
1.2	Households below total poverty line (%)*		32.2
1.3	Population below food poverty line (%)*		11.2
1.4	Households below food poverty line (%)*		6.9
2	Housing condition		
2.1	Households with straw/leaves roof (%)	0.2	
2.2	Households with bamboo roof (%)	20.6	
2.3	Households with metal sheet roof (%)	56.7	
2.4	Households with shingles roof (%)	20.5	

Source: Poverty Analysis Report 2007, Socio-Economic and Demographic Indicators, 2005.

2.5 Links between Poverty and the Shinghar-Gorgan Road Construction

The first pillar of GNH is sustainable and equitable socio-economic development under which poverty eradication is targeted as the first priority. The tenth five year plan is intended to root out poverty and aims at achieving an equitable distribution of social and economic infrastructural services throughout the country (3rd Annual Report, Prime Minister of Bhutan, 2011). A series of studies within Bhutan also found that access to roads reduced poverty. In a Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping Study (2005), 37% of the most vulnerable gewogs indicated that improvements in road accessibility would reduce food insecurity in their gewogs. The Participatory Policy Impact and Assessment (PPIM), 2010 on rural roads and rural poverty conducted by GNH Commission also found a similar result. According to the findings of these studies, the Shinghar-Gorgan road can be expected to help integrate rural communities and dispersed regions in to the national economy and to enjoy a greater share and benefits of the development.

Being landlocked, Bhutan is fully dependent on road network for transportation. Given the country's mountainous terrain, provision of road services is extremely difficult and costly. Nevertheless, major investments until now have been channeled into road and bridge infrastructures due to the fact that national security and socio-economic development of the country largely depends on a safe, efficient and reliable road network. The further development of the road network as an important part of the expansion of strategic infrastructure programme will effectively contribute to the reduction of poverty, an overarching goal of the tenth five year plan. A well connected national highway and road network system interlinked with rural feeder and farm roads would greatly help reduce rural and regional isolation, expand rural access to social services and urban/export markets and create conditions required to promote rural industrialization and non-farm enterprises.

More broadly, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), in a review of the relationship between poverty reduction and road construction, found that often roads could aid poverty reduction (ADB, 2003). According to the study by Fan et al. (2002),

the use of provincial data indicates that out of many government expenditures spend on growth and rural poverty in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the roads significantly had a high potential in reducing the poverty incidence through agricultural productivity and non-farm employment. Among government infrastructure projects, rural roads were found to have the largest impact on poverty incidence. For every 10,000 Yuan invested in rural areas, 3.2 poor people were estimated to be lifted out of the poverty.

Research on Vietnam also found that poor households living in rural communities with paved roads had a 67% higher probability of escaping poverty than those in communities without paved roads (Glewwe et al. 2000). An evaluation of a World Bank-funded rural road rehabilitation project in Vietnam found that the strongest positive impact was for the poorest households (Van de Walle and Cratty 2002). Similar studies in Nepal also found that providing extensive rural road networks resulted in substantial benefits, with poor capturing an appreciable share (Jacoby 1998).

Good infrastructure can provide vast economic benefits, contributing to productivity improvements and reduction in production cost while encouraging trade and facilitating development in other sectors like agriculture and education. The lack of good infrastructure has a profoundly harmful effect on bottlenecking growth and hindering economic and social development. Economies with higher levels of infrastructure quantity and quality are more advantageously positioned in terms of overall competitiveness compared to economies possessing poor infrastructure (APO, 2001). Furthermore, a small market size or lack of interconnectivity with outside markets can inhibit the possibility of productivity improvements and commercial activities in under-developed or rural areas (Ali & Yao, 2004).

Public investment in physical infrastructure would raise productivity and achieve long term growth especially in the rural areas because of the potential for raising rural productivity and employment so that it would contribute significantly to faster overall

economic growth in the village and the country. Table 2.2 shows the percentage of walking distance to a road head from households in Lhuntse district.

Table 2.2 Walking Distance to nearest Road Head

Time taken in hours	% of household (2005)
< 1hr	37.5
<1-2hrs	12.1
<2-5hrs	33.6
>5hrs	16.8

Source: Socio- Economic Demographic Indicators, 2005

2.6 Sustainable Development

There is always a tension between economic growth and environmental protection at the heart of environmental politics. The concept of sustainable development is a direct attempt to resolve this dichotomy by sending the message that it is possible to have economic development whilst also protecting the environment (Carter, N. (2007: 207). The 1987 report of the World Commission on the Environment and Development (WCED) stressed the need for economic development as well as environmental protection, and recommended the integration of environment and economics under the concept of ‘sustainable development’(Barrow, 2006:82). ‘Sustainable development’ was defined in such terms by WCED as:

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

According to the 1998 Human Development Report (UNDP 1998), the consumption must be: 1) shared- ensuring basic need for all; 2) strengthening- building human capabilities; 3) socially responsible- so the consumption of some does not comprise the well being of others; 4) sustainable-without mortgaging the choices of future generations. Sustainable development requires “a political system that secures effective citizens participation in decision making...” (WCED, 1987:65). Here, Environment Impact Assessment (EIAs) is used as a tool for sustainability. These analyses are meant to be used by the policy-makers to properly consider the cost-benefit ratio of new projects.

According to the World Bank, environmental assessments are useful tools to help avoid or minimize the undesirable impacts of a project. They achieved this by (WB, 1994):

- 1 Identifying potential adverse impacts and assigning their significance.
- 2 Recommending modification in the project design to avoid or minimize these impacts.
- 3 Designing mitigation, management, and monitoring plans to reduce or manage adverse impacts or compensate for those that are unavoidable.

EIAs stand as a valuable step towards ensuring the sustainability of planned infrastructure development project.

Since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, the role of poverty in both causing and being caused by environmental degradation was acknowledged. This was confirmed in the Brundtland Commission, which reiterated the ‘right to development’ for poor nations to gain prosperity and hence avoid environmental degradation. Since the 1980s, international agreements on environmental protection have reiterated the right to development for developing countries in order to increase their ability to protect environment, and also to prevent such countries from being penalized

for being poor. On this basis, Chapter 3 of Agenda 21 made poverty alleviation a matter of urgency, stating that policy should ‘enable the poor to achieve a sustainable livelihood’, (Grubb, 1993).

The Article 5 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan under Environment section (2) also states:

The Royal Government shall:

- (c) Secure ecologically balanced sustainable development while promoting justifiable economic and social development; and
- (d) Ensure a safe and healthy environment.

This places greater attention and resources for lesser developed and disadvantaged communities in remote and rural areas that have hitherto been marginalized by the failure to access basic services. Improving health conditions, creating knowledge, enhancing accessibility to market and services, raising rural income and wellbeing are intended to be fulfilled. This planned development is to be delivered within the tenth five year plan, which corresponds to the term of the current government from 2008 to 2013. (Third Annual Report, Prime Minister, 2011)

2.7 Government and Democracy in Bhutan

In 1953, His Majesty the Late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck introduced a National Assembly with 130 members. In 1965, he set up a Royal Advisory Council and a Cabinet Council in 1968. He enhanced the kingdom’s global role by making Bhutan a member of the United Nations in 1971.

During the reign of His Majesty the fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Bhutan witnessed unprecedented development, reforming the democratization process initiated by the third king. The move towards democracy was the corner stone of His Majesty’s

entire reign and the political developments that took place since the accession was all targeted at empowering the subjects and enhancing their participation in nation-building (Wangchuk, 2010:32).

2.7.1 Decentralization and Democratization

Made up largely of an illiterate population in early 80's, one of the initial challenges to development was on how to convince the people of the benefits of the local development. After his accession to the throne, the king actively promoted the idea of 'the government-people partnership' and the people's participation. Whenever he met the people, His Majesty used to say, "We must think as one, join hands and work together." (Lham Dorji, 2008: 91).

The system of government based on the political, social and development needs of the country and division of the functions of the state among the various branches of the government were set up. The step-by-step devolution of power to the people began with the establishment of Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogdue (DYT) in 1981, now known as Dzongkhag Tshogdue (DT), and Gewog Yargay Tshogchung (GYT) in 1991, now known as Gewog Tshogde (GT).

The DT and GT rule and regulation manual 2002 consolidated the power of the local bodies to take initiatives based on local needs and constraints. They were also given the power to approve gewog plans, to manage gewog budgets, expenditure and rural taxes, and to implement and monitor development activities (Lham Dorji, 2008:94). With the establishment of local elections on a universal adult franchise, the root of decentralization took place and there has been increasing process of decentralization from 2002 onwards.

Further democratic changes occurred when the Chairperson of the DT was transferred from the district governor⁷ to an elected DT member in 2002, which marked the shift of the power from the bureaucratic government to the elected representatives of the people. Here, after, the district governor became only a special observer who may advise the chairperson only if the plans and activities discussed in DT are not in line with the central government policies.

Planning at the gewog level begins with a briefing by the GT Chairperson to the GT members who are requested to hold (*Zomdus*) village meeting and identify proposals to be brought before the subsequent GT meeting. The process and quality of this activity vary widely from village to village and gewog to gewog depending on the level of prior training and capacity of the people on participatory planning. Although the five year plan was considered holistic and consists of inputs from various sectors for common outcomes and goals, the present annual planning and budgeting process is seen to be limited to activities from within the five year plan. This process of consultation is known as participatory planning process.

His Majesty, the Crown Prince (Present King) and experts from other countries reviewed the draft constitution and circulated it to the people on March 26, 2005 (in both Dzongkha and English) to get their suggestions. His Majesty traveled around the country and explained the significance of the constitution and advocated for democracy. Panel discussions on various articles were held and the provisions of the draft were aired on radio and television. The first parliamentary election in 2008 was contested by two political parties, Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The DPT led by Jigme Yoezar Thinley was elected to power with a landslide victory on March 24, 2008, to form the national government while the PDP formed an opposition party.

⁷A top civil servant who looks after bureaucratic affairs in district, appointed by King after receiving the nomination from Prime Minister.

The creation of modern judiciary started in 1960 when Drangpons (judges) were appointed in few Dzongkhags. The high court was created in 1968 and in 1985, first Chief Justice was appointed by His Majesty. To give equal rights to the people, District Court, High Court and the Supreme Court were established in the country where judiciary was strengthened to uphold and administer justice fairly and independently without fear, favor or undue delay, in accordance with the Rule of Law. Further the legislative bodies had their own sub-committees to look after the bilateral relations of the country. The Human Right committee, Woman and Child, Poverty Reduction and Legislative were some of the Committees that functioned as a check and balance in the government. To uphold the democratic institution, the constitutional bodies such as Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, Office of the Auditor General and the Royal Civil Service Commission, were established. The country has now transferred formally into a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy from an Absolute Monarchy.

2.8 Research Gap

Local governance institutions have an authority to make plan activities and implement at the local level since they are all elected and accountable to the people. However, when decisions are made, there is an absence of all various concerned stakeholders taking part in the decision making. Hence, there is need for further research on the decision making process and its democratic role. It also needs to evaluate whether the democratic process has successfully resolved the contradiction between poverty reduction and environment protection, taking the case of the Shingkhari-Gorgan road in Lhuntse dzongkhag. Although this road has attracted a number of studies and evaluations from the government side, none of them had consulted with the NGOs and the concerned government stakeholders who were responsible for protecting the environment. The feasibility of road studies conducted to date were mainly targeted on the direct impacts on

the poverty reduction, but lacked the balanced assessment between poverty reduction and environment protection which is the focus of this research.

Most attention and debate have been drawn to either reducing poverty or conserving environment and both remain unsuccessful. There is no concern on poverty from environmental degradation; however, there is much concern on poverty caused by the lack of developmental infrastructure. Limited attention has been given to research with regard to the impacts of infrastructure development on environment and forests and poverty suffered from environmental degradation. Therefore, this study intends to contribute towards filling this gap by investigating the impacts of decision making to achieve both poverty reduction and environment protection through the policy debate among various stakeholders including NGOs' viewpoints.

CHAPTER III

VIEWPOINTS AND ACTIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS WHO SUPPORT THE ROAD

This section introduces the responding viewpoints of stakeholders at the national and the local levels answering the first set of sub-questions of the study, “*Which stakeholders support the development of the Shingkhari-Gorgan road? How do they explain their viewpoints? And what actions have they taken to promote their viewpoint?*” The structures of the chapter cover these stakeholders’ position on the road, their viewpoints on poverty in the village, environmental status and finally the democratic process in Bhutan. The final section gives a summary of this chapter’s findings.

3.1 Position on the Road

3.1.1 National Level

The elected Government, Druk Phunsum Tshogpa, came to power after the election in 2008. They had to begin with the implementation of the tenth five year plan (2008-2013) with the main objectives to reduce poverty and to connect every gewog center by road. This plan is a product of planned activities through people’s participation in the decision making. (See section 2.7.1)

Regarding the Shingkhari-Gorgan road and the National Planning, the Lhunste MP, National Council said:

“The proposed road was once included in the 9th five year plan (2002-2008) but due to budget constrain it was dropped out and again included in the 10th five year plan. Parks and biological corridors in Bhutan are mixed with the human settlements. How can people deprive of road when there are settlements? (Interviewed on June 16, 2012).

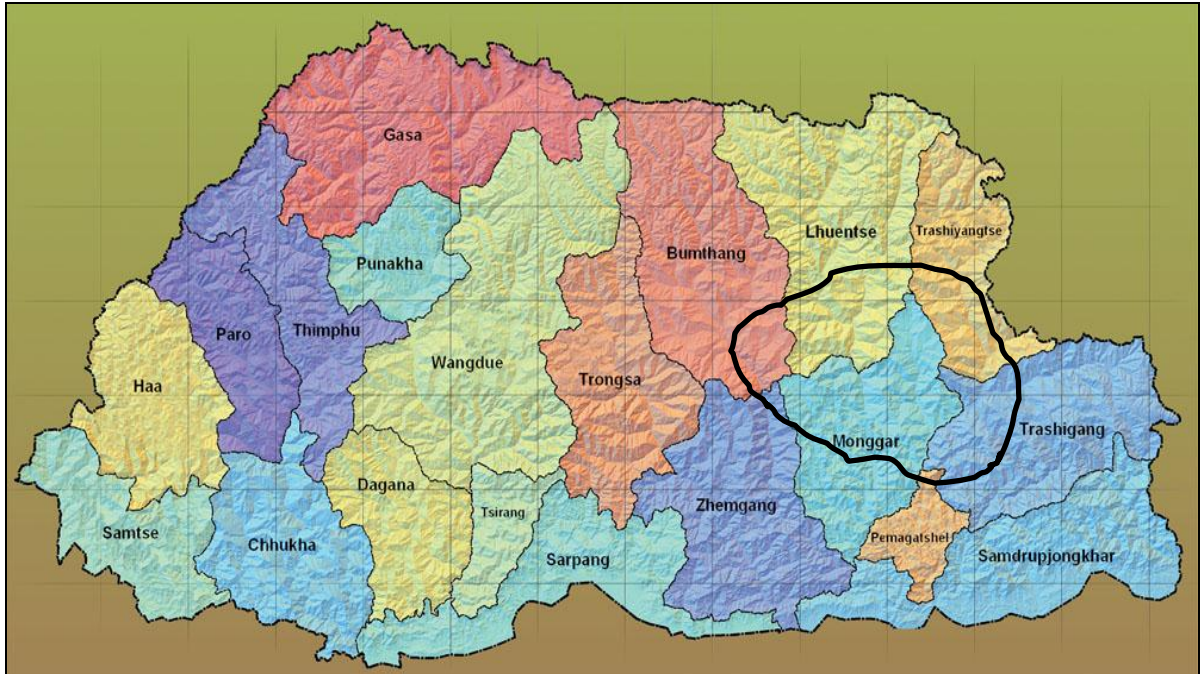
He further supported how the road would benefit other dzongkhags beyond Lhunste:

“It is not only Lhuntse dzongkhag that benefits from the road. In the future, this road will connect to Trashi Yangtse, which is another remote and least developed dzongkhag. It also cuts the distance to Monggar by many kilometers, so this in turn will reduce the distance to the whole of eastern Bhutan.

Eastern Bhutan in general has not reaped the benefits of economic development as much as its counterparts in western Bhutan. Conservationists should also note that when the travel distance is shortened, the emission from the vehicles is also less. (Interviewed on 16, 2012).

The MP from the National Council actively supported the need for the proposed road in Lhunste in deliberations in the National Assembly in 2011. As a result of the debates in the National Assembly, the Assembly Speaker instructed the cabinet to identify a budget for the road.

Figure 3.1 Political Map of Bhutan and the Eastern Districts that will benefit from the Proposed Road



3.1.2 District Level, Dzongkhag Tshogdue (DT)

The Constitution of Bhutan under Article 22 enshrines that, “Power and authority shall be decentralized and devolved to the elected Local Governments to facilitate the direct participation of the people in the development and management of their own social, economic and environmental well being.” The Dzongkhag Tshogdue (DT), established in 1981, provides direct links between concerns and aspirations expressed by elected representatives at the local level with national processes of policy formulation and development planning.

The DT Chairperson in Lhunste dzongkhag said:

“It is important to have the road because Lhuntse is the birthplace of Her Majesty the Queen Ashi Tsundru Lhamo⁸. Moreover, the existing road leading to Monggar highway separates it from central Bhutan, making both Lhunste and Trashy Yangtse dzongkhags as one of the remotest parts of eastern Bhutan. Trashy Yangtse, dzongkhag is also being disconnected from the central highway of the eastern region. It would be possible to connect Trashy Yangtse only through this proposed road. So the road is very important for the entire eastern districts. (Interviewed on June 20, 2012).

He said that the current road was already being constructed at Selibi to Pephu Gonpa in Metsho gewog which was around 12 km long. The road was included in the financial year 2011-2012 and so far received an amount of Nu 10 million from the total Nu 30 million for one financial year. The rest was expected to be released depending on the physical and financial progress of the Ministry of Finance and until now a 7 km road was constructed. It would continue in the next financial year 2012-2013.

3.1.3 Gewog Tshogde (GT), Metsho Gewog

This part gives the viewpoint of GT Chairperson, on the need of road to connect the most isolated villages in Metsho Gewog. The GT is decision making body at the gewog level involving grass root communities in the planning process. This gewog does not have any road and it is one of the poorest gewog in Lhunste district.

The GT Chairperson described on the road:

“Even after four decades of Bhutan’s development, Lhuntse has not been able to bring the benefits of development and is still one of the poorest

⁸Her Majesty the Queen, married to first King of Bhutan, Sir Ugyen Wangchuck.

districts. The recent decision taken by the government to construct Shingkar-Gorgan road is an answer for us, but the environmentalists criticize the government for doing good to people. They try to be innocent and are aware of the depth of poverty in Lhuntse, but in order to expand and sustain the horizon of their finances, they use the word 'conservation and preservation' to attract their donors abroad. At present the country is dependent on a single East-West national highway running through the northern part of the country. Most of the existing highways and bridges were also constructed at a time when the flow of traffic was very low. Every time we have the same agendas of the road forwarding to the next DT session. (Interview on June 22, 2012).

From these interviews, it was found that the proposed road had been discussed thoroughly in the GT session since 2005. Subsequently to this discussion, the GT submitted the agenda of the road to the DT session for further deliberation.

Figure 3.2 Lhuntse Dzongkhag with 8 Gewogs



He summarized the road objectives as given in the tenth five year plan:

- To reduce poverty of the rural population through enhancing rural accessibility.

- To enhance road connectivity and capacity to facilitate the accelerated hydropower development.
- To strengthen environment-friendly construction practices to minimize negative impacts on environment.
- To reduce travel distance for smooth transportation.

The GT Chairperson added:

“Access to Lhuntse by road is from the Monggar-Bumthang highway. There are number of newly constructed internal farm roads and many more are proposed. However, compared to other dzongkhags, Lhuntse still lacks internal motor roads and most villages still remain remote and inaccessible. Of the total road network in Bhutan, only 3.3% in Lhuntse was covered in the Annual Information Bulletin of the Ministry of Work and Human Settlements, 2009. When compare to other dzongkhags, it is very less.” (Interviewed on June 22, 2012)

In the focus group discussion, a resident from Gorgan said that:

“Bhutan’s development started when the first road was constructed in the early 1960s from Phuntsholing in the south to the capital in Thimphu. The road, once it was complete, opened the door to India, trade relations were strengthened, and many businesses benefited. It was mainly due to this road that our country began developing fast. Similarly then, if this road is also built in Lhuntse, poverty would reduce because our goods will have access to the market and many people will take an interest in our farm production. So, whenever the village representatives hold a meeting we always request them to include the road proposal as a main agenda for the GT session.” (Interview on June 22,2012).

3.2 Poverty in the Village

Regarding poverty, it has been proposed by project proponents as the main reason to build the road. This section examines the viewpoints of stakeholders who support the road as a way to reduce poverty.

3.2.1 National Level

The Lhuntse MP agreed with what the government's Poverty Analysis Report (PAR), 2007 found in Lhuntse with regard to poverty in the villages.

He said:

“43% of our population below poverty line in Lhunste is poor, which means for a small country like Bhutan where population is little more than 634,000⁹, it is a huge number and a big problem that needs an immediate solution and measures to reduce it. Bhutan receives many financial aids from donor agencies and the government is fully committed to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2015. These aids would help to bring down the poverty by providing various developmental activities in the dzongkhags and gewogs. If our NGOs in the name of environmental conservation use laws and policies to disallow the developmental activities, I am sure we will be further left behind many countries as more donor agency are slowly phasing out.” (Interviewed on June 16, 2012)

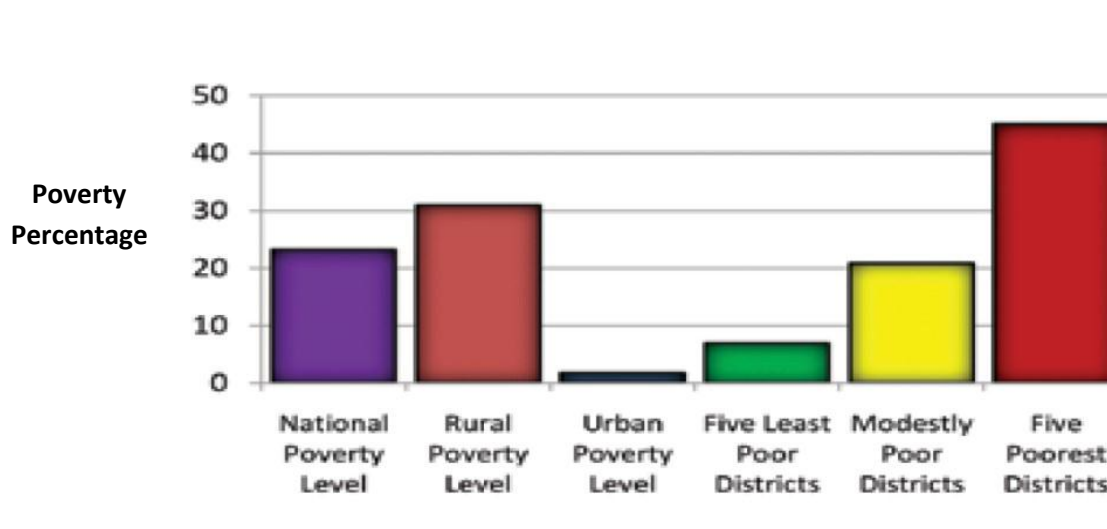
According to PAR, (2007), in Bhutan, the richest 20% of the population consumes almost eight times more than the poorest 20% and that poverty in Bhutan was a rural phenomenon. It was estimated that 30.9% of the rural population is poor against only 1.7% of the urban population being defined as

⁹In 2005, the population of Bhutan as per the Population and Housing Census, Bhutan 2005 (PHCB 2005) was 634,982.

poor. Concerning income poverty by Dzongkhags, five Dzongkhags, including Zhemgang, Samtse, Monggar, Lhuentse, and Samdrupjongkhar, were suffering from high incidence of income poverty levels ranging from 52.9% to 38%. These five Dzongkhags account for half of all the poor in Bhutan with the poverty incidence in these Dzongkhags collectively almost double the national average. (See also section 2.5 and Figure 2.2)

Furthermore, these poor Dzongkhags were characterized by their distance from the core urban centre and the capital, relatively dense populations, coupled with high outbound migration.

Figure 3.3 (Percent of Poverty) Poverty Distributions in 2007



Source: PAR (2007)

3.2.2 Dzongkhag Tshogdue (DT) Level

The DT Chairperson gave this account on the poverty in Lhunste. By comparing western districts that were already connected to roads (mostly in western Bhutan) to those

without roads (mostly in eastern and central Bhutan), he found that the standard of living was vastly different.

He said:

“The total poverty line is as low as 20% in the west and our eastern districts have more than 43% below poverty line. A Road is a desire for those affected by poverty so they have the opportunity to sell their farm products and also farmers can work hard in the field. Those people may not ask for road in areas where they already have roads. Instead they will demand and desire for a different thing. Why is Paro or Thimphu dzongkhag not poor? They already have enough roads and these help them to access market at their own convenience.”(Interviewed on June 20, 2012)

He also said that NGOs provided assistance to some of communities to reduce poverty in their own capacity. He said:

“If they have spend lot of money into that area as claimed, why are people still in dire poverty? Where is the benefit? Only a few households got help, but this is not going to solve the entire poverty in Lhuntse. Are we still keeping in the forest and say these people lived in harmony with nature in these areas for ages? To reduce poverty is everybody’s plan, so NGOs can still provide the assistance and the government can build the road so that the scale of poverty reduces at the fastest level. The poverty should be given priority over environmental protection when there are developmental activities coming.”(Interviewed on June 20, 2012).

3.2.3 Gewog Tshogde (GT) and the Local People

The Metsho GT Chairperson said that everybody knew Lhunste was one of the poor districts in the eastern part of Bhutan. He strongly agreed that, even within Lhunste, that his gewog been affected by poverty more than any other part. He described the poverty in his gewog village:

“Under Lhunste dzongkhag, Metsho gewog is the worst affected by poverty. Currently, Metsho gewog has a population of around 1170 with 244 households depending on agriculture and livestock farming and is more remote than any other gewogs. Only about 55% of the population of the gewog has access to piped drinking water supply and sanitation compared to 70% in other gewogs. While environmentalists show effort in their noble intentions, they should at least know how the local people are living and suffering in Lhunste just in the name of strict conservation policies. (Interviewed on June 22, 2012).

He also mentioned poverty reduction with support from NGOs funding:

“After Thrumshingla was declared as TNP, most villages of Metsho gewog, who earlier depended on bamboo for roofing and other construction purposes, have been denied of accessing the most basic requirement of living. This has made people look into other options of roofing mostly Corrugated Galvanized Iron (CGI) zinc sheets which are not environmentally friendly. Farmers cannot afford to pay for the CGI sheets. Although environment is also important, I also pity our people most of whom live in poverty. I feel that people need to be paid for what they have sacrificed for. Does development mean that the poverty stricken areas should be left in the situations they are in at the cost of conservation? They have already suffered for a long time, sacrificed their

right to accessing natural resources and the current decision of the government should not be resisted by the environmentalists.” (Interviewed on June 22, 2012).

It reveals that due to the action taken by the NGOs and the government, a government policy for the park has been created to protect the environment, in particular by reducing access to forest resources. This has resulted in local people being unable to access bamboo and wood for construction as easily as before. At the same time, the NGOs have tried to replace these resources with subsidized Corrugated Galvanized Iron (CGI) sheets. However, villagers have also found it difficult to afford to buy the CGI sheets as the NGOs requested that local people paid at least 20% of the cost of the CGI. The villagers have appealed to the government to allow them to keep using bamboo from the forest as they say they are poor and the CGI sheet which is costly.

3.3 Environment Protection and Road Construction

3.3.1 National Level

With regard to the environmental status in Bhutan, the MP shared the third annual report of the Prime Minister delivered to the parliament in June, 2011. He highlighted:

“Bhutan has become greener than ever before in our country’s recorded history. According to the 2010 land cover assessment study, based on the satellite images of 2006 to 2009, forest cover has increased from 64.36% in 1995 to 70.46% in 2010. The shrubs cover has also increased from 8.13% 10.43%. The overall forest cover (forest plus shrubs) has, therefore, increased from 72.5% in 1995 to 81.27% in 2010¹⁰.

Regarding the impact of Road, the MP said:

¹⁰ Every June 2nd (coronation day of the fourth King) is celebrated as Social Forestry day where all school children, teachers and senior bureaucratic officials plant trees at schools, in towns and nearby hills.

“The Shinghar-Gorgan road will not be a risk in any way to the environment. This road will reduce the number of km by shortening the distance. When the roads are shortened, the vehicle also consumes less fuel and produces less pollution to the environment too. Moreover, Bhutan heavily depends on the import of Indian fuel and every year billions of Ngultrums goes out to India. So it is a simple method that this road would save the outflow of money. (Interviewed on June 16, 2012).

As demonstrated above, the MP has tried to convince the NGOs that the current status of the environment and forest is good, for example by stating the forest area has increased in coverage.

3.3.2 Dzongkhag Tshogdue (DT) Level

The DT Chairperson also said that due to high environmental commitments from the government, they suffered the negative consequences of the success of environmental conservation from the regular human-wildlife conflicts where their crop was damaged every year by the wild animals. He said:

“Our environment is growing richer and richer. With a large forest cover and scattered agricultural lands often in the midst of forests, wild animals freely roam cultivated fields and substantially reduce crop harvests. The Bhutan National Food Security Strategy Paper (draft 2005) reported that wild animals damage major crops every year. In monetary terms, crop loss from wild boars alone is estimated to be around million of Ngultrum per year.

Therefore, the environment does not face any threat from the developmental activities so far. Many acts related to forest and

environment still dominate, as seen in the case of Shongkhar-Gorgan road.

Regarding the negotiated agreement between the NGOs and the government to conduct an EIA on the road, the DT Chairperson said:

“The other entry point of the proposed road from Shingkhar to Gorgan is now under resurvey for the EIA. The National Environment Commission (NEC) and other NGOS monitor the environmental assessment whenever the risk of environmental degradation is seen. (Interviewed on June 20, 2012).

3.3.3 Gewog Tshogde (GT) Level

The Metsho GT said that environment situation in Lhuntse was very good and this was the reason why species and wild animals were found here. He said:

“About the environment, we still take care and protect it because as a Buddhist, we do no harm to anything. We believe plants have soul and animals were once our parents. Human being may be reborn as an animal and animal may be born as human depending upon the deeds and goods that we practice now. Such practice further contributes in growing the forests even richer and richer, wild animal are growing stronger and stronger and we are becoming weaker and weaker. (He smiles.) This will bring further destruction to our hard work on the field. (Interviewed on June 22, 2012)

With regard to environmental protection, in the view of all concerned stakeholders the laws and policies have been well taken care of, and a number of different explanations have been posted in the focus group discussion.

“All development activities are important, but the road would be the most important at the moment. WWF-Bhutan funding has a problem, because they asked us to pay for the 20% of the cost of CGI sheets, but how can we pay them when we do not have any source of income? Environmental protection is also a problem, because now we are not allowed to cut bamboo and trees for our house roofing. Houses need to change the roof (shingles) every four to five years and bamboo are used to make our huts and sheds for cattle. Our hard work on the field was mostly destroyed by wild animals. But if the government constructs the road, we do not have to contribute anything and they will also benefit while visiting our isolated place¹¹. Similar discussion was taken in the GT session too where we supported in favor of the road and we forwarded to DT session. (Interviewed on June 26, 2012).

3.4 Democratic Process

3.4.1 National Level

When asked about the democratic process and the intervention from NGOs concerning the road construction, the MP said that the lowest level of decision making in (GT) comprising of village representatives and DT at the district level had approved the proposal to be submitted to the central level. He said:

“If the result of the proposed road from the elected members in the grass root were not supported by the government, then people’s participation in the decision making at a local level is a failure. Democracy has no place in the country. Likewise, even the elected national parliamentarian has a role to commit and provide a service to the people according to what we

¹¹From a focus group discussion in Lhuntse district on June 26, 2012.

have promised. Of course, it does not mean that the role of NGOs should be ignored.” (Interviewed on June 16, 2012).

He also said that while the road was constructed, due process should be respected at the same time.

He described:

“Since the proposed road is going to benefit the entire eastern districts, I do not see any other alternative development that is better than this. The other solution to this road development would be a joint EIA that will minimize the destruction of environment while operating the road construction. There should be a frequent visitor from the district officials to monitor whether the construction follows the rules and regulation of the environmental protection, such as dumping of soil at proper place and unnecessary cutting down of trees. (Interviewed on June 16, 2012)

The MP showed the summarized resolution of the National Assembly of Bhutan held on November 19, 2005, and said that this result from NA was a product of the local governance where it played a strong role in promoting the decentralization policy through people’s participation in the decision making.

“Thimphu-Trashigang highway particularly between Sengor and Yongkala under Monggar Dzongkhag was narrow and prone to vehicular accidents. Moreover, the road is blocked at Trumsingla because heavy snow and ice make it difficult for commuters to travel in winter. Since it was the policy of the government to shorten highways as much as possible, it would not only benefit the six eastern Dzongkhags but it would also shorten the distance if the lateral highway was re-aligned and constructed from Shingkhar in Bumthang through Singmala and Gorgan under Metscho gewog in Lhuntse.

Other members said that the re-alignment of road through Shingkar in Bumthang would entail fewer problems during the construction and also reduce the travel distance by 96 km. Therefore, it was imperative to realign and construct the road as submitted by the people of these two Dzongkhags.

In response, the Minister of Works and Human Settlement said that widening the driveway and reducing the travel distance of the existing highway were the policy of the government.

The National Assembly resolved that the re-alignment and construction of the lateral highway from Shingkar in Bumthang through Gorgan under Lhuntse Dzongkhag would be under taken according to the policy of the Royal Government to improve the existing road network and to reduce the travel distance. Furthermore, the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement should assess the possibilities of including the work in the Tenth Plan and submit a report in the 85th Session. The deliberation on the re-alignment of lateral highway was concluded on November 22, 2005.” (English translation of the resolutions of the 84th session of the National Assembly of Bhutan).

3.4.2 Dzongkhag Tshogdue (DT) Level

The DT Chairperson said that the road issue had been discussed since 2005 and still it is a dilemma whether the entry point from Shingkar would find its way to connect to Gorgan. He gave his viewpoint on democratic process:

“At the district level, all the eight gewogs in Lhuntse discussed thoroughly in the GT session and submitted the solution to DT. They supported in favor of the road and therefore the DT of Lhuntse in 2005 resolved and

passed the resolution to the NA that the Shingkar-Gorgan road be constructed. This road was a long aspiration of the people of Lhuntse petition to His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo over fifteen years. At the national level it was deliberated in the previous National Assembly sessions. It was last discussed in the 84th session of the National Assembly in 2005, which resolved that the road must be included in the 10th Plan.”

He also said that the local governance was gaining popularity among the communities by taking part in the decision making and truly having faith in the democratic process.

“As a local leader elected for five year terms, the most important achievement for the gewog would be the road connection between the gewog center and other large villages. If that is possible within this five year terms, I think people will have faith and trust, not only to me but as a whole towards democratic process and its decentralization policy since our people at the grass root level participated in this decision making in proposing the road. Therefore, people would be proud to see the road and will have more faith in the local governance. Besides, we promised during the local campaign that every gewog center would try to connect with the road although local governance was not an affiliated unit in a political party. If natural calamity strikes us anytime, then we are in trouble. The absence of road brings about the lack of interest to produce more products for sale and, as a result, there is no income to improve our livelihood.”(Interviewed on June 20, 2012).

3.4.3 Gewog Tshogde (GT) Level, Metsho Gewog

Metsho gewog is further divided into five chiwogs (or small villages). Each chiwog has its own village representative. With regard to democratic process, he said:

“According to our Constitution, GT sessions were held twice a year and before the session, a village representative holds a meeting with the communities on the developmental activities required in the village. The village representative will take note of the discussion and submit the report to the GT session. The chairperson will discuss with all the GT members with regard to different agendas from each chiwog for further submission to DT. The current proposed road was well channeled through this democratic process and our GT session unanimously passed the resolution to DT session. From DT, it was also approved to be submitted to NA.” (Interviewed on June 22, 2012).

Figure 3.2 The Map of Mestho Gewog and the Current Proposed Road (brown color) Passing through Zhongmey, Gortshom and to Gorgan. Figure 3.4 Map of Mestho Gewog



The villagers believed that no one would stop their proposed Shingkar-Gorgan road as they were informed by their respective village representative that the proposal was finally submitted to NA for approval. They heard so much about the strength of GT, DT and the decentralization policy and now when they heard the NGOs' intention to prevent the road construction they were surprised.

A shopkeeper in Gorgan said:

“We always hear that any plans and activities discussed and approved in our gewog (GT) is strong but now I feel that NGOs are even stronger than the local governance. Forgetting about seeing vehicle in our time, at least I was expecting that our children would see vehicles moving in Mestho gewog. (He laugh). During the inauguration ceremony of the Selibi-Pephu Goenpa road last year¹², I was very happy as this road would benefit Methso, Jarey and Tsengkhar gewogs, especially Lhuntse. Our place in Metsho gewog is quite backward compared with other gewogs. If roads are connected to us, then all developmental activities will follow. Without road we feel like we are living in an isolated place.” (Interviewed on June 26, 2012).

With regard to environmental status, the shopkeeper said that when TNP was not recognized, we were quite free to cut bamboo and trees for house roofing, small and tall trees were cut down to use as prayer flags.

He said:

“Before, it was very simple to get permission from the dzongkhag head quarter to cut trees and bamboo. Now, after the forest were identified as TNP, there is no question of cutting down of bamboo and trees. The park official monitors the forest and claimed that villagers were provided funding to buy CGI sheets and solar lighting from NGOs. Since we live in a village, sometimes bamboo is required to make temporary sheds and roof for the cattle. The regulations are very strict and this is our problem. Moreover, due to their strict monitoring, many wildlife animals seem to enjoy the hard work that we put on the field. (Interviewed on June 26, 2012).

¹²The 12 km Selibi-Pephu Goenpa road was inaugurated by Hon’ble Secretary Sonam Tenzin (MoWHS) on November 1, 2011.

3.5 Analysis and Discussion

This section seeks to find differences and similarities within the government and local elected representatives who support the Shingkar-Gorgan road in Lhunste dzongkhag.

The MP from National Council finds that the reduction of distance of the road from Shingkar-Gorgan proposal would minimize emissions from vehicles and benefit not only Lhunste dzongkhag but also the entire eastern region of Bhutan. The outflow of money to India would also be saved. As for the poverty status, it was found that the current rate of poverty with 43% in Lhunste is a serious problem that needs immediate solution. All stakeholders mentioned that the proposed road was included in the 10th five year plan and was submitted to the NA after it received support from the community in 2005 via the DT and GT.

The MP at the national level accepts that an EIA should be done by jointly involving all the concerned stakeholders, keeping in the mind that the road would bring damage to the environment. However, he argues, the poverty status of Lhunste dzongkhag and the eastern districts needs to be taken into consideration.

Concerning environmental status, at the national level, it is found that the environment is growing rapidly and hence there is no threat of degradation.

The DT has also shared that there is an increase in environment and forest and more human-wildlife conflicts are seen. Due to these conflicts, there is a huge loss of crops amounting to millions of Ngultrums. Another reason found at the GT level is that, the growing thick and dense environment is due to their attachment to the Buddhist view about respecting all plants and animals and considering killing as a great sin.

With regard to democratic process at the national level, it is found that democracy is questionable if the local decision making body's strong resolution is not considered. The

DT and GT feel that the process of decentralized policy has been well followed in all the gewogs and submitted to the DT and then finally to NA. It has also been learned that if there is withdrawal of fund from the donor agencies, then it would affect the progress of the government's policy of poverty reduction where poverty still remains large in the rural area. The absence of a road further weakens their income and there is a vast difference of poverty within western and eastern Bhutan, such that even a subsidized rate of 20% of the total cost of CGI sheets and solar lighting was difficult to pay for villagers in Metsho gewog. They also welcome road construction as it doesn't require paying for anything. Local people prefer both the road and NGOs support in the communities, so that the rate of poverty would be reduced by great margin. The interaction of stakeholders in approving the proposed road, however, does not guarantee that the road would immediately come into force as the agenda still needs further verification of the joint EIA. In general, the stakeholders who support the road proposal do not have any other alternative development other than the road itself as they follow the democratic process through people's participation in the decision making, although an EIA is welcome to monitor the field site to have minimum destruction to the environment.

Village representatives of Metsho GT conducted village meetings in each village to decide to propose and subsequently support the Shinghar-Gorgan road. The village representative is the lowest elected member of the Gewog (block), who are directly elected by the villagers.

At DT level, the members of DT all supported the road construction in Lhuntse. The DT strongly believed that the road would reduce poverty in Lhuntse as the road would connect them to the market and enable them to sell their farm goods. Furthermore, travelers on the road might also stop to buy farm goods thereby increasing the income of the farmers. This increase in income will help improve the standard of living in the village and may also reduce rural urban migration that has left many rural households empty. On this basis, the members of the DT agreed to submit the road Shinghar-Gorgan road proposal to the National Assembly.

At the National Assembly, the proposal was deliberated in 2011 and concluded that the road should be constructed in Lhuntse to benefit the entire eastern region of Bhutan. The MPs emphasized that the road have been proposed by the GT and DT and therefore had originated from the participation of local governments. However the NA speaker asked the cabinet to assess if there were enough fund available. Towards the end of 2011, the cabinet approved the proposed road for construction.

CHAPTER IV

VIEWPOINTS AND ACTIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS

WHO OPPOSE THE ROAD

This chapter will answer the second set of questions of this study: *Which stakeholders oppose the development of Shingkhar-Gorgan road? How do they explain their viewpoint? And what actions have been taken to promote their viewpoint?* The respondents gave the viewpoints on the position on the road, poverty, environmental protection and democratic process. The last section, analysis and discussion of this chapter's findings, is included in Section 4.6.

4.1 Position on the Road

The Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) immediately responded to the government's Shingkhar-Gorgan road project that the laws as well as a thorough Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) should be followed. The government agencies who opposed the project were the National Environment Commission (NEC) and the Department of Forest and Park Services (DOFPS).

4.1.1 World Wildlife Fund-Bhutan (WWF-Bhutan)

The Chief Programme Officer of WWF-Bhutan explained that, unlike other districts, Lhuntse did not have rich agriculture and livestock production for sale, so the road construction would have more negative impacts towards environment protection without much economic development. They supported Bhutan's Gross National Happiness which proposes the middle path or a balanced development between economic growth and environment protection. WWF-Bhutan said that to balance the fast growing

economy from various infrastructure developments, certain Acts such as the Environment Act, 2007, Forest and Nature Conservation Act, 1995 and Environment Assessment (EA) Act, 2000, would play a vital role, which did not necessarily restrict the development growth but would monitor and examine the strict procedures during the exploration of developmental activities to ensure no negative impact on the environment.

He said:

“The road construction of Shingkhar-Gorgan is not required at the moment as there is no extreme poverty in Lhuntse district and they already have an existing road connected to the capital. It is our responsibility to keep the share of our rich resources for the future generations. What we have now is not entirely ours. It also belongs to our future generations and they too deserve to enjoy as much as we are enjoying. Of course, I don’t mean that Lhuntse does not deserve the road, but look at our Acts and Laws. The current road proposal clearly passes through the core area of protected parks and the government is the one who makes the laws and now they are pushing the road which they say is for the entire benefit of the eastern dzongkhags. The government is looking at short term benefit.”(Interviewed on June 7, 2012)

They were satisfied with the intervention against the proposed road project and it was regarded as a great achievement of all the NGOs who stood and battled for this result. There were some differences when it came to undertaking a joint EIA. WWF-Bhutan feels that the EIA should be prepared by a third party instead of a joint collaboration between government and NGOs to avoid government’s influence on the proposed road project. However, if it is not possible, they would still support the joint EIA.

The Senior Programme Officer also said:

“Now that the Shingkhar-Gorgan road is proposed to be a farm road size, rather than a highway, it is unnecessary because the area already has

farm roads. Therefore, it is not an urgent issue in Lhuntse. However, if the government has no solution other than constructing the road then it should be better to have a joint EIA. The NGOs accepted to work with the Government team to assess the EIA over the ecological sensitivity of the proposed road construction, thereby balancing the environment and development. I am assured by the good intentions of the Government, and informed of its dilemma to delicately balance environment and development and we are happy to join hands with Government in the conduct of EIA.” (Interviewed on 9 June, 2012).

Following the petition from the NGOs to the government, the proposal for a joint-EIA was accepted as a compromise by all the stakeholders to re-examine the balance between the environment and poverty reduction.

4.1.2 Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN)

An ecologist from the Royal Society for Protection of Nature similarly replied that the road was not the best option for the government to reduce poverty, and other income activities, such as promoting eco-tourism through trekking/biking and cultural tour, could also generate high income to the communities. She disagreed with the road and said:

“I don’t see any benefit to the communities from this road. In fact, this road will affect the low income people, because some people still earn their livelihood through porter and pony charges from officials and some local tourists visiting there. Look at Gasa dzongkhag which used to be one of the remote districts before and many people earned sufficient income from horses by providing services to the visitors and tourists. Now, everybody travels by vehicle and of course one may reach within a day, but the local people who own the horses don’t get anything from the road

and a similar situation would happen in Lhuntse. Poverty means poor and the road will serve rich people who have cars and those who can afford to travel. People with low or no income who originally belonged to the community would still suffer even if there is the road. But having said that, it doesn't mean there is no place for a road in Lhuntse. In general, it is possible to build a road and protect the environment at the same time, because to counter the government's decision in any activities, many NGOs now play a strong role to check the Constitution, Acts and regulations of the government.”(Interviewed on June 11, 2012)

She said that the huge financial cost allocated to the proposed road would be better spent on the current existing highway, such as maintaining and widening the driveway for smooth transportation. The existing highway already passed through the TNP and had caused a huge degradation of the environment during its long-term operation. This new proposal for another road to enter through the TNP would again surely disturb the habitat of hundreds of species, plants and wild animals including the red pandas and Bengal Tiger.

She said:

“Today the government's responsibility is to look for economic growth and our role would be to see whether the policies and laws are being followed to protect and preserve the environment. The Prime Minister assured the environmental leaders that the road would not be built mindlessly but with utmost care for the environment. He said that the most rigorous EIA would be carried out and expressed happiness at the support extended to the government and concluded that no misplaced environmental agenda will kill the aspiration of the people of Lhuntse. This Government remains very committed to environmental conservation

as the underpinning of the GNH philosophy. (Interviewed on June 11, 2012)

With regard to the proposal for a joint EIA, the head of Bhutan Ecologist Society (BEST) which was a partner with WWF and RSPN during its petition, responded to the government in a Press Release dated August 22, 2011, that the views of the Prime Minister demonstrate him to be a champion of the environment who he believes to be a champion of the environment and wildlife not only within the country but also as a world leader on environment conservation.

Furthermore, RSPN Executive Director, Dr. Lam Dorji, agreed on the need for poverty alleviation of people living in remote dzongkhags and isolated communities. However, he also requested that a thorough EIA would be carried out to mitigate potential negative impacts from the road construction. She respected what the Prime Minister promised and quoted the above Press Release.

4.1.3 National Environment Commission (NEC)

The head of the Environmental Assessment Division under the National Environment Commission (NEC) had a different story in which he believed there was no controversial issue between stakeholders with regard to the current proposed road. He said:

“The media and the people all around know that the Shingkar-Gorgan road construction is a controversial issue as it was going against the law and the government did have to halt the construction for some time after the NGOs appealed to the judgment of the government. The current road project is divided into two phases, one entry point at Shingkar in Bumthang and the other at Selibi in Gorgan in Lhunste. The present

construction at Selibi to Pephu Goenpa in Gorgan is outside of the core zone and the environmental clearance issue is purposely only for this. However, if the government still wants to connect the entry points from Shingkhar to Gorgan, they need to seek an environmental clearance that is entirely going through the core zone of TNP and there will be conflicts with the laws and policies.

He gave this account:

“If the government has no option other than constructing the road to reduce poverty in Lhuntse, they should ask for the recommendation of the Park officials for re-zonation of the entire park so that the road will have an access to pass through Shingkhar-Gorgan, or ask the Department of Roads (DoR) to see the possibilities of re-alignment of the road outside of the core area which would be the easiest way to avoid conflicts with the laws. I do not support even NGOs proposal to amend the laws as this option would mean that the laws need to change every time a conflicts arise with the development activities. However, it is still safer to amend the laws in the assembly than going against it, but this may set an example in the violation of other laws in the country. Converting the road into a farm road from a planned highway will not serve its purpose because there are so many farm roads which are not maintained well and hardly use, due to the lack of financial resources. (Interviewed on June 14, 2012).

4.1.4 Department of Forest and Park Services (DoFPS)

The head of Wildlife Conservation Division (WCD), under the Department of Forest and Park Services (DoFPS), disagreed with the proposed road. He said:

“There are many laws that restrict the construction of any kind inside the protected areas of Bhutan. Unless those laws are first amended, how can the construction of such a road go ahead? There is not enough justification to break the law. It does not seem like it is justifiable that such an expensive road that cost millions of Ngultrums, with huge destruction to the environment is right simply to provide fast service of transportation of the people from Lhuntse to get to Thimphu in a shorter time. The environmental damage that will be caused by the Shinghar-Gorgan road has more negative impact than the benefits to the people of Lhuntse. (Interviewed on June 14, 2012).

He added that His Majesty the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck’s tireless work and effort in environmental conservation won the 2006 J. Paul Getty Award for Conservation Leadership - Political Leadership in Conservation and His Majesty’s leadership resulted in the establishment of government policies and laws that had substantial positive impacts on conservation and helped ensure environmental sustainability in Bhutan. The King’s efforts to preserve Bhutan’s natural environment has spanned several decades resulting in outstanding accomplishments including a system of protected areas and biological corridors known as the Bhutan Biological Complex.

He said:

“This proposed road could have a negative impact on Bhutan’s reputation as a champion of environmental conservation. It would be difficult and shameful to explain this irresponsibility to many donor agencies that provided assistance in millions of Ngultrums to help create the Biological Corridor and the conservation initiatives that have been achieved so far. (Interview on June 12, 2012).

4.2 Poverty in the Villages

4.2.1 World Wildlife Fund-Bhutan

With regard to poverty in Lhunste, the officials from WWF-Bhutan said that in many cases it is not necessary to build the road to reduce poverty. Even if there is a road but if there is a shortage of drinking water, poor access to education and absence of basic health etc, it will also contribute to an increasing the poverty rate.

He said:

“Poverty is important if there are many people affected by it. But I can say that we are fortunate to have our wise leadership of Wangchuck Dynasty and therefore we do not see such a pathetic condition of poverty compared to other countries. Bhutan has 23.2% of population below poverty line, but we do not see people dying of starvation, neither do we see slums in the streets. Lhunste district has no absolute poverty. Personally, I have visited Lhunste and have not seen any beggars and slums. Although some houses are made up of bamboo and cane, they are all busy working in the fields. I saw livestock animals in most parts of the villages. Roads alone cannot guarantee to achieve poverty reduction (Interviewed on June 9, June 2012)

As an alternative approach to the development, the NGO identified the poorest village in Lhunste (Ungor) to uplift them from poverty. With the overall goal of consolidating conservation landscapes, they are now focusing on how to reduce poverty by providing assistance to the poverty-affected communities. Moreover, they have initiated a project called the Integrated Conservation Development Programme (ICDP) which helps provide assistance to the communities to reduce poverty. WWF officials said that these villages did not suffer from extreme poverty although they had low income. He described:

“Ungor village with 36 households in Lhuntse district is one of the most remote communities in Bhutan. It borders the north eastern part of Thrumshingla National Park. It is one day’s walk from the nearest road point. They just lack alternative forms of livelihood strategies, such as rearing of pigs, good quality cattle etc. Additionally, most livestock produce low yields. Being herded and grazed freely in the forests, potential wildlife habitats are encroached upon. Outdated kitchens without smokeless stoves are used which not only consume more fuel wood but also leave people exposed to smoke which could result in high incidence of smoke related diseases.(Interviewed on June 8, 2012)

The World Wildlife Fund through ICDP has some suggestions to help the village of Ungor as follows:

- Enable park staff to renovate the old drinking facilities and irrigation water facilities and provide new water supply and irrigation to the households which do not have access to such facilities.
- In order to reduce fuel wood demand, the park will provide the biogas technology on subsidy.
- Try to increase the number of improved breeds by providing bull service (brown Swiss) to discourage low yield cattle.
- Since piggery is the fastest way to generate income for the communities, the park will provide improved pig breed. The pig waste will be used to feed to biogas plant.
- The park will carry out a study on abundance of wood and bamboo and develop resource allocation plans and guidelines for the communities.
- The park will hold trainings on dairy and piggery management.

The project also provides rural scholarships for 45 disadvantaged students.

4.2.2 Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN)

An ecologist from RSPN, believed that poverty existed in Bhutan, but it was not an extreme poverty. She disagreed with the level of poverty found in PAR, (2007):

“We see a lot of people severely affected by poverty in other countries. But as far as my knowledge, I don’t see any people suffering badly from poverty at least in our country. It is just a global commitment that we are obliged to international norms. Even environment protection is a global concern that needs solutions too. Although it is important to reduce poverty, it should not necessary be through the road construction alone. It may be right that poverty is mostly found in the eastern districts of Bhutan, but compared to other countries poverty here does not mean people are dying now and then. The educated people from Lhuntse easily accept the government’s argument based on the dzongkhag’s poverty level. What they forget is that the road, which is breaking a conservation rule, is not turning out to be as promising as it initially seemed. In fact, it is a stillborn promise. If poverty is also at the heart of their argument, they should seek better and alternative development with the government, not a farm road across snowy mountains.” (Interviewed on June 11, 2012).

4.2.3 National Environment Commission (NEC)

The head of the Environment Assessment Division under NEC also agreed with the existence of poverty, but did not truly believe in the level of poverty in Bhutan. He explained:

“No matter how statistics prove the level of poverty in the country, the law always comes first. The National Statistical Bureau (NSB) and World Bank have come up with a new map showing pockets of poverty at the

block level and it was found highly affected in the eastern districts. But the poverty needs to be classified among many factors, whether it is the poverty from food, shelter, electricity, education, health, drinking water, road or land, etc. If there is no option to construct the road then why has it been justified to be placed in TNP in the core zone area? (Interviewed on June 14, 2012).

4.2.4 Department of Forest and Park Services (DoFPS)

The head of Wildlife Conservation Division (WCD) also considered that poverty was not a serious issue that required an immediate solution to curb down the rate in Bhutan.

He said:

“Of course, compared with the western districts, the people in the east do face hardship to sustain their livelihood. But it is something that is far better than the poverty in other countries where thousands starve to death due to an absence of or insufficient food.” (Interviewed on June 13, 2012).

He said that the government must bear in mind that while it seemed to be eager to extend the luxury of an exclusive bypass to the people of Lhuntse, people in other Dzongkhags lacked basic necessities, such as piped drinking water, and farm road and proper school facilities. Zhemgang district was even worse than any other district in Bhutan.

4.3 Environment Protection and Road Construction

4.3.1 WWF-Bhutan

If the proposed road were constructed, there would be many threats including the loss of species, mammals, plants and birds.

The Chief Programme Officer said:

“The unfortunate consequence of such human-wildlife conflicts is the loss of key and irreplaceable species, such as tigers. People from Ungor have been responsible for the poaching of four tigers. Two have been killed as retaliatory action for livestock loss, while the other two have been killed for trade purpose. The road would further help the poacher to kill those species and transport them conveniently. Such missing species could break the ecosystem or result in the environmental degradation and this impact would fall on all entire human beings. Disasters like erosion, flood, landslide, drought and untimely rainfall would contribute to increasing the poverty through poor harvest. (Interviewed on June 9, 2012).

4.3.2 DOFPS

The DOFPS said that, in general everyone was responsible for keeping the current environment in good condition. It showed that environmental conservation was important.

Table 4.1 Protected Areas of Bhutan

Total area of Bhutan	38,394sq.km
Total area of Protected Areas (PA)	16,396.43sq.km
Percentage covered by PAs	42.71%
Percentage covered by Biological Corridors (BC)	8.6%
Percentage covered by conservative areas	0.12%
Total percentage of PAs and BCs	51.43%

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, DOFPS, 2010, Thimphu.

Nevertheless, if the continuously growing infrastructure proceeds unchecked, natural resources would become exhausted, and may affect the constitutional law which mandates to keep 60% of forest cover at all time.

In the roads feasibility report, it was expected that the frequency of vehicle traveling on the new road to be little in number. He said that eastern people more conveniently to visit Gyelpozhing in Monggar district than the capital city in Thimphu.

“The tendencies of Lhuntsips to visit markets in Gyelposhing, in Monggar can be more than like Bumthang to Thimphu as many eastern people considered Gyelposhing the capital of the east. So shortening the road is not expected to have much impact on the people’s economy in those regions. Yet, if Shingkar-Gorgan road is carried out, then the rare species like red panda and tiger will have difficulties adjusting to the ecosystem with this disturbance. (Interviewed on June 12, 2012).

4.4 Democratic Process

Whilst the current proposed road has been passed through the decentralized democratic process from GT and DT, it has been a challenge to those who oppose the project through the use of national law. Therefore, this section explains the viewpoints of stakeholders who oppose the road on the democratic process.

4.4.1 World Wildlife Fund-Bhutan

The Chief Programme Officer from WWF-Bhutan mentioned that when it came to national development issues like the Shingkar-Gorgan road over the core area it was the government stakeholders who decided and the process of local governance was also strong in supporting the road proposal. But when it came to national issues on environmental protection, other concerned stakeholders and NGOs were not given an opportunity to give their viewpoints while the decision was being made. There should have at least consultation with the concerned stakeholders as true democratic participation should include discussion with the entire conservation group.

Therefore, he explained:

“Decision making at the local level is strong, but at the national level, where NGOs lack an opportunity in the decision making on major development activities, it proves that decentralization is not that strong. Democracy should accept all issues from different stakeholders (NGOs) so that the parliament can deliberate with broader knowledge. (Interviewed on June 9, 2012).”

4.4.2 Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN)

An ecologist said that when the Shinghar-Gorgan road proposal was approved by the Local Governance, it made sense that the decision making in Bhutan was bottom-up. However, in practice, it hardly worked.

She said:

“I know the proposed road in Lhuntse was resolved by both GT and DT, but I think they are already influenced by the central government. To decide at the local level, there was no problem, but when the issues concern the national institutions, the local institution does not have any authority to decide. I feel that in a decentralized country, all stakeholders should sit together to sort out the different opinions and it is the only way one will feel the strength of decentralized policy achievement. (Interviewed on June 11, 2012).

4.4.3 National Environment Commission(NEC)

When asked about the decentralized policy on approving the proposed road, the head of the Environment Assessment Division under NEC said:

“Decentralization policy has been working since 1981 and by this time the local governors are experts in decision making and well aware of the policies of the government. They know the proposed road would enter across the core zone area, and the GT and DT should find other alternative routes as they are the ones who know the field better including where settlements are located. I think the government agencies, like the Environment Commission, DOFPS and Department of Road (DoR) should get involved and consult with one another to have a joint decision on the proposed road. It might avoid intervention from NGOs. This is because we

are also a part of the government body, functioning under them and serving to achieve their goal too.” (Interviewed on June 15, 2012).

4.4.4 Department of Forest and Park Services (DOFPS)

The DOFPS official said that the proposed road had been democratically discussed in the local government and passed on to the national level. Since the local people were the sole beneficiary of the road, none of them had argued against it.

He said:

“But the absence of NGOs and a joint consultative effort from all the stakeholders in the decision making of the Shingkhar-Gorgan road sometimes feels that we are not following the true democratic process. The cabinet issued the government instruction with the objective to shorten the travel distance. The issue was conveyed to the DOFPS by the Ministry of Works and Human Settlements (MoWHS) further stating that the ministry is reprocessing with the environment commission for environmental clearance of the proposed road construction which was earlier rejected by the DOFPS due to serious environmental concerns. Two feasibility studies involving multi stakeholders¹³ had been carried out in 2006 and 2010.”

The concerns identified by the DOFPS towards the two studies conducted, the latest one undertaken from 8th to 14th October, 2010, were:

- a. There is not a single human settlement between Shingkhar and Pelphu Goenpa along the overall distance of 36 km within the core area. (See figure 4.1)
- b. More than half of it will pass through altitudes over 3,000 m, barely 8 km from Shingkhar. The road has to pass over the height of 4,000 m. It is much

¹³ It includes District Governor, two MPS of Lhunste, an Engineer and surveyor from DOR, and officials from the districts.

higher than the Thrumshingla pass which is not possible during the winter months.

c. The road alignment envisages a minimum total of 22 turning points. This clearly means that the terrain is very steep, and thus prone to landslides.

d. The area is wet and shrouded in mist and fog half of the year and the other half it is snow bound and the soil condition is very loose and very unstable.

e. It is stated that the construction will involve the use of explosives consisting of gelatin, safety fuse, and Cordex. The results will be catastrophic given that the whole area is unstable and fragile.

f. The TNP and the Forest Department have, on two occasions – one in April, 2007 and another in June, 2011, refused the clearance for the construction of the road on various grounds, but mainly because there is a law in place that prohibits any construction activities in the core areas of the park.

The Google map below shows the proposed road from Shinkhar to Gorgan without a single settlement found until it reaches to in Metsho gewog.

Figure 4.1 Google Map of the Proposed Road from Shingkhar to Gorgan



4.5 Development Alternative

4.5.1 WWF-Bhutan

The Senior Programme Officer from WWF-Bhutan said that under the ICDP project, WWF has been providing assistance in various forms to reduce poverty not only to Lhunste Dzongkhag but all dzongkhags that have been included in the core zone area of TNP. They claimed that instead of road development where there was a clear indication of conflict with the laws, the government together with the NGOs should support the improvement of the living conditions of the affected people in TNP to ultimately achieve the government's goal of poverty reduction.

He said:

“It is economically not viable to spend millions of Ngultrum on a few beneficiaries there. If the government is serious about poverty in the east, then they should think of eco-tourism as thousands of tourists visit the country. The rich culture and tradition, fresh environment, rivers, mountains and birds could be possible attractions for tourists to visit. And the worst they could do to build the road is amend the law. The best and easiest answer to these issues is not to construct the road in the first place.”

He also said that the ICDP project could still be an alternative development for the entire settlement found along TNP. However, Lhunste did not face the worst scenario of poverty, so they could still be a recipient of funds which had a major impact on poverty reduction. The following development activities could be considered as an alternative and have more impact than the road. He explained:

“Our organization, from 2003 – 2006, had provided bamboo and cane management trainings to 120 households in Metsho and Jarey, plantation nursery management to 50 households in Lhunste and Zhemgang, supplied CGI sheets to more than 20 households in Lhunste, including 11 households in Ungor, and 5 monasteries. We shared the cost ratios of 80:20, so the villagers paid only 20% of the total expenses. We also provided solar lights, renovated a village temple, distributed improved agriculture seeds, and introduced low volume and high value cash crops, such as walnut, cardamom, asparagus, potato and strawberries, to the households in Lhunste as well as other neighboring districts, including Monggar and Zhemgang. Almost 10 km of irrigation channel benefiting 45 households in Lhunste was renovated in 2003-2004. By providing CGI

sheets it saved hundreds of trees used for roofing which otherwise have to change every four to five years.” (Interviewed on June 9, 2012).

4.5.2 Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN)

The RSPN ecologist gave her views on alternative development that Bhutan should look for. She said:

“The government has planned to increase the tourist inflow to more than one hundred thousand to generate revenue for the country. But Bhutan is a small country and we don’t have any special identity to impress them other than our rich environment like forest, wild animals, rivers, plants and species. Most tourists want to explore through trekking and biking across mountains, forest and river. Creating employment in the local village by selling their local handmade goods and providing services through eco-tourism will also develop the community. It is understood that this road will have a negative impact on the environment. The road is not the best option to reduce poverty. These days thousands of tourists want to temporary renounce their busy urban life to seek peace and happiness and refresh their mind in the Himalayan country of Bhutan, and so far it received tourists only in the western and some central parts of Bhutan. The government can initiate and promote balanced tourism through culture, trekking and biking in eastern Bhutan. (Interviewed on June 11, 2012).

4.5.3 Department of Forest and Park Services (DOFPS)

The DOFPS also explained why Bhutan should look for alternative development. It was because of some international repercussions on the current proposed road.

The Chief Forest Officer said:

“Bhutan is signatory to many international conventions including the Convention of Biological Diversity which amongst other things established 10 protected areas comprised of about 51% through the generosity of many donor agencies. In November 2010, Bhutan participated in the international Tiger Conference (TRC) in St. Petersburg. There we promise to double the tiger population by 2022. The pledge requires TRCs to restore their formal range by declaring prime tiger habitat as “No Go Areas” meaning in other words that all developmental activities should be strictly prohibited in these areas. Bhutan also organized a two day “Smart Green Infrastructure Workshop” in May, 2011 in Thimphu and further endorsed it through “The Thimphu Recommendation” that the core area will remain inviolate.

He gave his opinion on the existing old road.

“The Department of Roads suggested that the proposed road would incur huge financial cost which is around Nu.890.35 millions. Instead of this expenditure, it would be better utilized by widening the existing Bumthang –Mongar-Lhuntse highways to upgrade it to a double lane road to make travel time effective and safe. There have been lot of accidents and every year the death casualty increases due to the poor and narrow road.”(Interviewed on June 11, 2012).

Nevertheless, if the continuously growing infrastructure proceeds unchecked, natural resources would become exhausted, and may affect the constitutional law which mandates to keep 60% of forest cover at all time.

In the roads feasibility report, it was expected that the frequency of vehicle traveling on the new road to be little in number. He said that eastern people more conveniently to visit Gyelpozhing in Monggar district than the capital city in Thimphu.

“The tendencies of Lhuntsips to visit markets in Gyelposhing, in Monggar can be more than like Bumthang to Thimphu as many eastern people considered Gyelposhing the capital of the east. So shortening the road is not expected to have much impact on the people’s economy in those regions. Yet, if Shingkar-Gorgan road is carried out, then the rare species like red panda and tiger will have difficulties adjusting to the ecosystem with this disturbance. (Interviewed on June 12, 2012).

4.6 Analysis and Discussion

Overall, the common viewpoints of the stakeholders who opposed the road were on the issues of poverty. They agreed that it was not in a severe condition and did not require an immediate implementation of poverty reduction from the road. However, WWF-Bhutan identified poor villages in Metscho gewog and provided them with various assistance to support them for better living conditions. NEC pointed out that although there was poverty in Lhuntse, the issues of poverty should be clear whether they had problems with food, shelter, clothes, electricity, access to drinking water, education or health facilities etc. RSPN sought alternative development projects, such as eco-tourism, to direct the flow of tourists into the east, so that it would promote local employment in the communities. DOFPS, meanwhile, highlighted Zhemgang district as the most severely hit by poverty.

The main cause of the conflict was the proposed road from Shingkar to Gorgan passing through the core area of TNP, which was earlier approved by the local and the central government. There are several different viewpoints on the road project. The NGOs would like to have an EIA from the third parties to avoid the influential role of the

government in favor of the road, while the government stakeholders felt that the EIA should have been conducted before the intervention of NGOs so that the dilemma of the proposed road had been avoided. The viewpoints of NEC suggested the re-zoning of the entire park to allow the road to pass through TNP, or the re-alignment of the road to be out of the protected area. The amendment of law was another option to avoid conflicts with the laws.

DOFPS highlighted the rich environmental status and gave his viewpoints that the proposed road would have international repercussion as Bhutan had many commitments at the international level. Therefore, alternative development, such as spending money widening and maintaining the existing roads would have higher positive impact than proposing the new one.

The NGOs said that despite the strength of local governance through decision making, they could not guarantee the road proposal to be implemented immediately, as there was a lack of consultation from other concerned stakeholders and this controversial debate could have been avoided if there had been a joint consultation to make a joint decision before the road proposal was put into action. On this issue, NEC said that the government should invite the government stakeholders into the decision making process regarding the road since these stakeholders functioned under them, and served to fulfill the same objectives.

WWF-Bhutan and RSPN are the two largest environmental NGOs in Bhutan, established in the year 1977 and 1987 respectively. Their main objectives are promoting environmental conservation and managing the system of protected areas. With the support of international donors, WWF-Bhutan initiated the Integrated Conservation Development Program (ICDP) to safeguard the protected areas of Thrumshingla National Park, and spent millions of Ngultrums to achieve this. Since the proposed road violates the Forest and Conservation Act, 1995 and the Environment Protection Act, 2007, these two NGOs immediately submitted a petition against the government's proposal.

The National Environment Commission (NEC) and the Department of Forest and Park Service (DOFPS) is also mandated to protect the environment with the goal to maintain a minimum of 60% of Bhutan's total land area under forest cover at all times, as required by the constitution. Although these two stakeholders are government agencies, they support the NGOs views. The NEC and the DOFPS before supported the idea proposed in the NGO's petition to organize a joint EIA with the objective of reducing the potential environmental degradation from the road.

The violation of the Forest and Conservation Act, 1995 and the Environment Protection Act, 2007 by the proposed road was the main reason that the NGOs challenged the government's decision. The acceptance of the proposal by the NGOs for a joint EIA by the government stakeholders who had supported the road's construction was an important milestone for fair and democratic decision making in Bhutan. As a result, the stretch of the road that would have passes through the protected area's core area was suspended. However, the stretch of the road from Selebi to Pephu Goenpa in Metsho Gewog, which was located in the national park but outside of the core protected area, has been constructed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Chapter III, the stakeholders who support the road described the condition of poverty and, their viewpoints on the road requirements, environmental protection and the process of democracy in approving the proposed road through various levels of local governance to the National Assembly. In Chapter IV, the viewpoints and actions of the stakeholders who opposed the road were discussed and identified in terms of environment protection, democratic process and importantly how to minimize the environment degradation in accordance with a joint EIA which is an agreed solution among all stakeholders. The chapter also discussed how those who oppose the proposed road project prioritize policies in favor of environmental protection and alternative development instead of constructing the road. This chapter contrasts the findings and analysis of the previous two chapters and provides some conclusions and recommendations.

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Poverty Reduction and Road Development

The elected government at different levels, including GT, DT and NA, who supported the proposed road argued that the proposed road benefited not only Lhunste dzongkhag but also the entire eastern region of Bhutan and in general the whole nation in reducing the poverty rate from 23.2% to 15%, which was the objective set by the current government in 2008. They are concerned that the rate of poverty at 43% in Lhuntse was a serious problem that needed an immediate solution. Moreover, the strong environmental policy might affect the assistance of international donors, while Bhutan still needed developmental activities to reduce poverty. These stakeholders compared the poverty between eastern and western districts of Bhutan. The western districts had a low rate of poverty due to the access of road.

The DT Chairperson said:

“The total poverty line is as low as 20% in the west and our eastern districts have more than 43% below poverty line. Road is a desire for those in poverty stricken areas while it may not feature prominently in areas where they already have roads. The areas where they already have roads will desire for a different thing. Why is Paro or Thimphu dzongkhag not poor? They already have enough roads and these help them to access market at their own convenience.”

The NGOs and the government stakeholders (NEC and DOFPS) who opposed the road claimed that the government would have avoided joint intervention from them if they had followed the laws or at least amended the law. They suggested that balanced eco-tourism in Bhutan would reduce poverty, by creating employment for the local people and claimed that poverty should be precisely defined for on the different classes, whether it was from food, shelter, clothes, electricity, access to drinking water, education and health facilities, etc.

The NGOs said poverty in the area did not require an immediate implementation of road construction for poverty reduction. However, they identified a poor village in Lhuntse and provided assistance to support them for better lives and claimed that the proposed road alone could not reduce poverty. Other alternative funding from NGOs projects, like the Integrated Community Development Programme (ICDP), also fulfilled the objectives of the government in reducing the poverty in general.

WWF-Bhutan said:

“Poverty is important if there are many people affected by it. But I can say that we are fortunate to have our wise leadership of Wangchuck Dynasty and therefore, we do not see such pathetic condition of poverty comparing to other countries.”

5.1.2 Environment and Road Development

On the environmental status, both the MP and the DT members said that the forest and environment were growing rich and hence there was no threat of degradation caused by the Shingkhar-Gorgan road. They claimed, that due to rich environment and forest, and its strong policy implementation towards environmental conservation, there were more human wildlife conflicts which resulted in huge loss of crops amounting to thousands of Ngultrums. The GT gave other reasons for growing thick and dense environment. It came from their attachment with Buddhist view that killing and harming all living and non-living thing was a sin.

The MP said:

“The Shingkhar-Gorgan road will not be a risk to the environment. This road will reduce the number of km by shortening the distance and when the roads are shortened, the vehicle also consumes less fuel and produces less pollution to the environment too. Moreover, Bhutan heavily depends on the import of Indian fuel and every year billions of our currency in the form of Indian Rupees goes out to India. So it is a simple method that this road would first save the out flow of money and secondly the crunch of Indian Rupees in Bhutan would be minimized.”

On the other hand, the NGOs were concerned that the road would affect the environment and its impacts would have international repercussions, as Bhutan had many commitments at the international level. Therefore, alternative development, such as spending money on widening and maintaining the existing roads would have higher positive impact than proposing the new one. The feasibility research conducted in 2010 found that the proposed road alignment would have many turning points which meant the land area was difficult terrain and very steep and prone to landslides passing through the altitude of 3000 m. The WWF-Bhutan appealed that the Shingkhar-Gorgan road could

destabilize the ecosystem, ultimately disturbing the human lives through disasters caused by the environmental degradation and, even if the road was needed, then at least the EIA should come from a third party to avoid a conflict of interest in favor of the road. The NEC suggested alternatives to allow construction of the proposed road by re-zoning the entire park, or re-alignment of the road to be out of the protected area or the amendment of law to avoid the conflicts.

5.1.3 Democracy Process and Road Development

The stakeholders who support the proposed road found that the decision making by the local governance of GT and DT fully utilized the democratic process in drafting the plan and proposing to the NA. This showed that the community had the freedom to express their viewpoints in the official system under the decentralization policy to gain power for their own communities. As a result, they gave their viewpoints on the proposed road that it was included in the tenth five year plan and had been submitted to NA since 2005. The MP was concerned that democracy would be questioned if the decision made by the local governance was not approved due to the NGOs' intervention on the proposed road. The local governance strongly believed in the process of decentralized policy which they followed well and submitted it to NA.

The MP said:

“If the decision of the proposed road from the local governance was not supported by the government due to the NGOs' intervention, then the people's participation in the decision making is a failure and democracy has no place in the country. Likewise, even the elected MPs have a role to provide its commitment and the services to the people according to what we have promised.”

They also found that the NGOs and the government stakeholders were not included in the current decision to propose the road, although they had a strong participation at the local level. So the NGOs said that it was an incomplete democracy if the concerned

stakeholders were not included in the decision making when it came to national issues, like Shinghar-Gorgan road, that required national level policy to resolve it. More importantly, the proposed road was not in line with the law and was going against the Forest and Conservation Act 1995 and the Environmental Protection Act 2007 that prohibits any infrastructure development through the protected areas of national parks, biological corridors and wild life sanctuaries.

5.1.4 Joint Environment Impact Assessment (EIA)

The Cabinet instruction was first conveyed to the Department of Forest and Park Services (DOFPS) by the Secretary, Ministry of Works and Human Settlement (MOWHS), on August 9, 2011, to issue the forest clearance for the proposed road. However, DOFPS rejected this due to serious environmental concerns and also due to laws that do not permit the road to go through the protected areas of TNP. Based on this, a group of NGO leaders submitted a petition on August 19, 2011 to the government and raised an issue on the importance of the environment and the relevant laws.

Therefore, after the NGOs' petition, on August 22, 2011, following a meeting which included the Cabinet Secretary, Home Secretary, Works and Human Settlement Secretary, Agriculture Secretary (MOAF), National Environment Commission Secretary and the former Thrumshingla Park Manager and all heads of NGOs agreed to have a joint EIA as the best solution to minimize the environment degradation and to carry out the construction. It was the NGOs who proposed for the joint EIA to compromise between those who support and those who oppose the road. The acceptance to have the joint EIA from all stakeholders itself was a positive response from the democratic government to respect the viewpoints of every stakeholder. However, there were some different opinions about the EIA between the stakeholders who opposed the road, where the WWF-Bhutan thought that the EIA team should have come from a third party neither belonging to government nor the NGOs. NEC felt that the EIA should have been conducted before the

implementation of the work in the field, not after NGOs' petition to consider the importance of environment.

The Prime Minister assured the environmental leaders that the road would not be built mindlessly but with utmost care to environment. He said that the most rigorous EIA would be carried out and expressed happiness at the support extended to the government. This Government remains very committed to environmental conservation as the underpinning of the GNH philosophy (Press Release, August 22, 2011)

One of the head of NGO said, *“Our submit would be that the due process of law must be followed, including a thorough EIA.”*

An ecologist from Royal Society for Protection of Nature said:

“Today, the government’s responsibility is to look for economic growth and our role would be to see whether the policies are followed to protect and preserve the environment.”

5.2 Conclusion

The study was conducted in an attempt to answer the main question: *“How have the competing policy priorities of Poverty Reduction and Environmental Protection been presented, debated and acted upon by the key stakeholders?”*

The cooperation and unity of the grass root people in resolving and submitting the road proposal show some sort of ownership as a community organization and they have pride to see the results in Lhuntse. These effective results inspire them to continue participating in the future planned activities at the local level, although the NGOs at the national level have authority to intervene in the government’s decision. The roles of elected members and public servants have drastically changed. For instance, the role of elected representative in GTs and DTs has shifted from advisors and implementers to complete decision-makers on development priorities and planning. Therefore, poverty

reduction according to the GT and DT representatives and NA has been the main target of the Shingkhar-Gorgan road construction in Lhunste. With 43% of population below poverty line, it is so severe that it needs an immediate attention from the government.

However, the NGOs and the government stakeholders who opposed the road claim that democracy is incomplete due to the lack of joint decision and partnership in the decision favoring the road. These stakeholders say that the local governance is strong, but when it comes to national issues, the local governance alone does not have assurance to achieve whatever they propose, as democracy means accepting other stakeholders' viewpoints to have impacts on decision-making with better and wider knowledge for the policy makers. They remind the government that the laws prohibit any infrastructure development going through the protected areas and the violation of laws, such as Environment Protection Act, Forest and Nature Conservation Act and the Constitution, by the proposed road would be going against the principle of true democracy.

Therefore, the joint EIA accepted by all stakeholders is an achievement to further strengthen the democracy as it includes NGOs, government stakeholders, elected local officials and national government and grass root people in the decision making. It was an opportunity for the government to listen to all voices that create positive impacts on the decision regarding the proposed road. Other opportunities would be the solutions, strategies and knowledge on how to construct the road with minimum environmental degradation, and how NGOs would work to create awareness on the laws and its crime of poaching wild animals in the park area. They also exchange and gain new knowledge from various stakeholders about protecting the environment, such as re-plantation of trees to prevent soil erosion, cutting down only the marked trees, keeping sign board on the construction site to warn road users about wildlife crossing the road, etc. However, having said all this, there exists some challenges in the EIA. Since it requires all stakeholders to bring consensus decision, it takes time to decide and the annual planning and budgeting requires estimation of the proposed road including expenditure on

everything, but without the final decision, the approval would be delay. Since it involves many stakeholders in protecting the environment, it has a budget constraint.

There also lies a threat that if the government immediately respects the NGOs' intervention on the Shinghar-Gorgan road and stops the construction, then their objectives in the tenth five year plan (2008-2013) mainly targeted to reduce poverty by road connectivity would be unsuccessful. The elected government will not fulfill people's choice and the people may lose faith in democracy even though the planned activities are decided by people.

5.2.1 Development in Bhutan

In Bhutan, about 70% of the people live in rural areas. Whilst most of the country's area is generally connected by a road network, still more than half of the population has to walk several hours to reach the nearest road. Bhutan's economic growth depends mainly on its agriculture with livestock and farming still the main source of livelihood in rural Bhutan.

Bhutan's economic development began when the first five year plan (1961-1966) was implemented with funding from the government of India, marking a new era of economic development and growth in Bhutan. The plan focused primarily on building basic infrastructure like roads, a communication system, power system, and to modernize agriculture, animal husbandry, health, education and transport services. An important activity in the first five year plan was the construction of a road from Phuntsholing in the south of the country to the capital Thimphu in the north. This road ended the country's isolation from the world as it opened the door to trade with India and Bangladesh. (The Planning Division , Ministry of Finance, 2004)

The following five year plans began to construct more roads that connected the dzongkhags' centres, in the process contributing to poverty reduction in Bhutan, which

has been considered as one of the least development countries economically in Asia. The growing road system has helped the rural population access the market to sell their farm products, and road access has also helped other forms of service provision such as health and education services. Now that all dzongkhags are connected by a road network, the 10th five year plan (2008-2013) therefore has prioritized to connect every gewog centre. In Bhutan, road construction is still considered and understood as an important element of growth and development.

However, the increase in development activities such as road construction in the country also creates the threat of environmental degradation. Therefore, the Forest and Conservation Act (1995), Environment Assessment Act (2000), and the Environment Protection Act (2007) are important to balance between economic growth and environmental protection in Bhutan. The kingdom's constitution also mentions that a minimum of 60% of the country's total area of land should be covered by forest at all times, a policy that has received international acclaimed worldwide.

The recent democratic changes in Bhutan have promoted people's involvement in decision making from the local to central levels of government and through this mechanism proposed road construction. Meanwhile, NGOs and some government stakeholders have highlight the violation of the above Acts that seek to protect the environment. The media, such as Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation (BBSC), has broadcast live debates about the road and its impact on poverty reduction and environmental protection creating awareness to the public on the tension over this challenging issue.

The policy debate between poverty reduction and environmental protection in Bhutan is also a local, a national, and a global concern. Bearing this in mind, therefore, considering the importance of poverty reduction first, the road should be constructed, but at the same time due regard should be given to the importance of environment too. This

can be achieved through the partnership between all stakeholders in compromising and undertaking a joint EIA.

5.3 Recommendation

If the poverty in Bhutan is unchecked, it will further increase from current rate of 23.2% of population below poverty line. The PAR (2007) found that the poverty in Bhutan is basically a rural phenomenon where roads have a high potential for poverty reduction compared to other development activities.

It is very important that there is recognition that the social and environmental issues today must be solved through participation by all government stakeholders, the public, NGOs and private sectors. Therefore, each of these various sectors should work to support one another to address these crucial conflicts within the law and identify how both poverty reduction and environmental protection can be achieved without breaking the laws or how the road can be constructed without damaging the environment. To address the gaps in the policy debate on poverty reduction and environmental protection regarding the Shingkhari-Gorgan road construction in Lhuntse District, the following recommendations are made.

- 1 The RGoB must address the importance of local governance and must allow participants in the GT and DT session as ‘observers’ from the regional departments or NGOs even though they are not administratively under dzongkhag, but works within the dzongkhag’s territory. This practice would solve the difference of opinion in the session itself through clarification of laws, policies and regulations by the concerned officials.
- 2 The government should also study and analyze the alternative development suggested by the NGOs/concerned stakeholders in Lhunste district and compare the impacts on poverty reduction. Moreover, they should respect the decision, which follows the principle of democracy through people’s participation in the local governance and at the national level.

- 3 The stakeholders who oppose the road should study and analyze the larger view of the proposed road that benefits the entire eastern districts of Bhutan where poverty is largely located in the eastern region. In a smaller view, this road benefits directly to Lhunste, the least developed dzongkhag in the eastern area with a total number of eight gewogs.
- 4 The park management should look for the advantages of road through TNP. The park management in fact can give more important role for enhancement of conservation efforts through greater mobility of park personnel, survey and research works and eco-tourism and other protection of wildlife.
- 5 The government should build the proposed road according to the recommendations of the joint EIA in which many stakeholders will play a role to check and balance the process. Moreover, the Prime Minister has given an assurance and commitment that the road construction will be taken as an especial case under the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement.
- 6 Rather the cabinet, the parliament should approve the road proposal because this will ensure full democratic accountability. The government should also take account of the result of the debate broadcast on national television and the debate in online media to evaluate public opinion for the construction of road.
- 7 In Bhutan, the GT is the lowest decision making body. Each village in the Gewog has one representative in GT that facilitates participation. People are empowered to participate as when the village representative represents the village in decision making in the GT meeting they must show evidence at the meeting that the villagers support the representative, usually through submission of thumbprint agendas to the GT Chairperson (who will then represent the GT at the DT). In other words, when the village representative to the GT holds a meeting with the

public about the development activities requested in the village, it facilitates the people's participation in choosing and deciding. Therefore, NGOs and the stakeholders who opposed the road should recognize the decision making process as a bottom up procedure.

5.4 Further research

Based on the findings of this research, several areas have been identified for further research.

Any developmental activities that seem to affect the environment and forest should first discuss with the concern stakeholders of the government agency and the NGOs that deals with the maintaining of environmental policy to safeguard the environment. Importantly, joint EIA from all the stakeholders irrespective of government, NGOs, media, need to present before the public so that the competing policy priorities between poverty and environment will be clearly understood by all. The research needs to focus on "how will the road reduce poverty" and if so then does the road become an ultimate source of development in Bhutan? Further research is also needed to find out their cooperation among the government stakeholders and the NGOs, between local and central government, and between NGOs and local governance.

Furthermore, research is also needed, in what ways did the environmental policy affected the development growth or how did the developmental policy threatened the environment?

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APPENDIX

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

General questions:

- 1 What is your view on environmental protection in Bhutan? How important is it and what is the current status of the environment?
- 2 What is your view on poverty and poverty reduction in Bhutan? How important is it and what is the current status of poverty?
 - a. What is the current level of poverty in Lhuntse district?
- 3 What is your view on the process of decision making in Bhutan in general? Are the institutions for decentralization strong?

On Shingkar- Gorgan road:

- 4 What do you see as the main benefits of the Shingkar Gorgan Road? Who would benefit and how?
 - a. How would the road reduce poverty?
 - b. How would the road affect the environment?
- 5 Is it possible to build the road and protect the environment at the same time?
 - a. If yes, how?
 - b. If no, why not?
- 6 Is it possible to reduce poverty without building the road?
 - a. If yes, how?
 - b. If no, why not?**
- 7 What do you think about the EIA in Bhutan?
 - a. Will the EIA help solve the disagreement?
 - b. Do you think the NGOs can still be independent whilst working in partnership with the government?

- 8 Overall, what do you think about the Shingkar- Gorgan road? Do you support the project or not, why?

Participation in the decision making process

- 9 How have you/ your organization participated in the decision making process?
- a. Could you describe the decision making process to date?
 - b. What official processes have you been involved in?
- 10 Regarding the decision making process to date?
- a. Has it been democratic (meaning, has all stakeholders been involved)?
 - b. Has it been fair?
 - c. Is it a successful example of decentralized decision making with the involvement of the DT and GT?
 - d. Has it successfully resolved the difference of opinion between stakeholders?
 - e. How could the decision making process be improved?

For those who support the road: What do you think about the stakeholders who oppose the road? Why?

For those who oppose the road: What do you think about the stakeholders who support the road? Why?

BIOGRAPHY

Mr. Tashi Penjor is the author of this thesis. He was born in Bhutan in 1980. He grew up in Thimphu, where he completed his undergraduate from Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School in 2000. He completed his B.A in Language and Culture Studies in 2005, from the Institute for Language and Culture Studies, Royal University of Bhutan, Semtokha in Thimphu. After graduation, he joined the civil service under the Ministry of Home and Culture Affairs and till now he has been in the service for seven years in two dzongkhags.

Currently he serves in Gasa dzongkhag and lives with his family in Gasa. His area of interest is social and economic development particularly in the field of poverty reduction and environmental conservation of neighboring countries in Asia, particularly Bhutan and the South Asian region.