

PROJECT BHUTAN



Bhutan is a monarchy with a two-party parliamentary democracy. Simple agriculture underpins the economy but there is increasing income from timber, tourism and hydroelectricity.

China and India are Bhutan's largest neighbours. **Almost completely cut off for centuries, Bhutan has tried to let in some aspects of the outside world while fiercely guarding its traditions.** Both television and Internet came to the country in 1999 but media freedom remains restricted.

Dzonghka is the major language with Buddhism the official religion. Nepali is also widely spoken. However, English is the medium of instruction in schools.

Family inheritance generally passes through the female rather than the male line. Daughters will inherit their parents' house. A man is expected to make his own way in the world and often moves to his wife's home. **The tradition of arranged marriages is still common in villages.** Although uncommon, polygamy is accepted, often being used to keep property within a family rather than dispersing it.

The previous king, who abdicated in 2006, had four queens, all of whom are sisters. The current king married a commoner and daughter of a pilot, in 2011.

Until 1965, Bhutan was closed to virtually all Christian witness. There then followed a period of 25 years when limited freedom allowed Indians and expatriates to witness.

Today, restrictions are once again in place and evangelism is illegal in Bhutan. The country greatly restricts religious freedom of Christians. Only a few churches are allowed their own buildings. **Most gatherings of believers take place in homes.**

Many of Bhutan's believers have been saved following careful literature distribution by both Indian and Nepali believers.

Those who come to Christ often find themselves losing benefits of Bhutanese citizenship such as free education, access to health care, jobs, and even water and electricity. Some face physical mistreatment.

Most of the 35 or so languages do not have the Bible available.

PLACING

Our partners provide financial assistance to enable trained gospel-workers to start micro-businesses embedded in their local community. The businesses not only help the local economy but also generate a sustainable income for the family, freeing workers to serve as tentmakers without long-term financial assistance from outside.

Those who are eligible for help are workers who have completed their formal Bible training, gained experience in their home congregations, and have already planted at least one other new Christian fellowship.

The scheme has been run successfully for many years and led to trained workers and their families having a stable income from their own steady employment. Simple pig farms, tea-shops, and banana plantations have all been established. **It allows them to live locally, be self-supported, and engage with those around them not only for work but also for evangelistic witness and pastoring.**

The project releases local fellowships from the strain of having to fund their workers and at the same time offers employment to families in a society where a quarter of the population remains in poverty.

TRAINING

Primary evangelism, by Bhutanese and among Bhutanese, will help plant strong indigenous roots for evangelical work across the country

AsiaLink partners are training Bhutanese gospel workers to share Christ and to lead fellowships that are emerging.

Formal theological training over a two-year period enables workers to handle God's Word effectively across rural areas.

PRAYER

- for courage, faith and fruit among Bhutanese believers facing persecution
- for deep unity among evangelical churches across an often divided Christian population
- for more people to read God's Word, whether in Dzongkha, Nepali or English
- for more doors to open for careful Christian witness
- for a fellowship of believers to witness among every ethnic group of the Bhutanese.