

Bhutanese Need to Write Compelling Proposals

An Interview With Dr Bruce Bunting, Founder and President of Bhutan Foundation

The Druk Journal: *What are the areas that international donors are interested in?*

Dr Bruce Bunting: I am not really clued into international donors these days, but I feel in the US support for good governance, growth of democracy, support for cultural institutions in particular the arts, support for conservation of the environment especially wildlife, and issues dealing with climate change are all considered important. It might be a good idea to look at the Foundation Center’s website for current information on this. They put out very complete reports looking at international support, etc.

The Druk Journal: *What are some key issues that affect international funding for development?*

Dr Bruce Bunting: Probably the biggest issue in the US is politics. Our current government is hell bent on cutting foreign aid, etc. In addition, individual donors in the US are now diverting their funds to political organisations that are trying to do things to change the political agendas on the Hill and the current US administration a.k.a. Trump’s administration.

The Druk Journal: *Briefly, how would you describe Bhutan as a potential recipient of foreign support in terms of development funding?*

Dr Bruce Bunting: I think it remains very good. However many donors feel Bhutan is a success story and that they should be focusing their support on the “basket cases” of poverty such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal when you look at South Asia as a region.

The Druk Journal: *What do you think of Bhutan’s approaches to fundraising? What are the strengths and weaknesses?*

Dr Bruce Bunting: Your current Prime Minister is an incredible spokesperson for Bhutan and his TED talk in Canada last year is a good example of this. The biggest weakness I see is Bhutan’s inability to draft compelling proposals of why they need outside funding that express any sense of urgency. And then their total failure to report back to donors on funds they receive. This is at both the government level and with Bhutanese CSOs.

The Druk Journal: *Are there specific advantages and/or problems in trying to raise funds for Bhutan? For example, Bhutan's image as a GNH country?*

Dr Bruce Bunting: Bhutan is a leader in equitable and sustainable development, an example of what is possible. They should continue to promote their role on issues such as “climate change” and “nature needs half” fully inclusive education, etc. They should promote that even very small investments/donations to Bhutan are very effective. Our biggest problems centre around the lack of well thought out proposals and total failure to report back to donors.

The Druk Journal: *Today, there is a growing interest and focus on civil society in Bhutan, but funding is identified as a major problem. How do donors react to funding proposals for non-government activities?*

Dr Bruce Bunting: I think they react very favourably to a growing civil society in Bhutan, but most CSOs in Bhutan need to improve their management, provide their leaders with training, make sure their boards understand their role, and greatly improve their ability to communicate effectively with donors. We often feel there is a total lack of interest in developing the skills they need to be effective organisations. We have tried on many occasions to introduce and train CSOs on good financial and accounting management, the ability to tell their story effectively, the need to have fully engaged board members, the need to report back to donors. It has been a very frustrating experience, although there are a few CSOs that have now realised how essential it is to have good systems in place and have participated and implemented the training we have provided. With time we hope all CSOs will understand how important it is to operate in a most professional manner, with an engaged board of directors (who are also financially supporting the organisation), and a leadership and staff who are passionate about their mission and work.

The Druk Journal: *From what you know of Bhutan, what funding sources do you think CSOs should or could tap into?*

Dr Bruce Bunting: Based on what I have said already in this interview, the Bhutan Foundation would be an excellent source for most CSOs, but the failure to be able to tell their story, articulate an urgent and pressing need, provide a well written compelling proposal with a concise budget, and then report back in a timely manner, is essential for them to raise funds in the US.