

IFOAM Delegation Advises the Government of Bhutan on its Organic Strategy



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Last January, the IFOAM PGS committee met in Bhutan. Taking advantage of this opportunity to host international PGS experts, the government of Bhutan organized a 2-day workshop to advance their national organic strategy and get feedback and advice from a team of IFOAM representatives. Three PGS committee members, Gunnar Rundgren (ex-IFOAM president) and IFOAM staff Joelle Katto-Andrighetto participated in the governmental workshop.

Bhutan is a small mountainous country in the Himalaya region, bordering with India and China. Compared to other countries, the Bhutanese government has a very pro-organic vision: that all of Bhutan should be organic within a few decades. The Ministry of agriculture nevertheless tries to be realistic in the implementation of this ambitious strategy and adopt a progressive approach. Most Bhutanese farms are very small, don't use external inputs and produce mainly for local consumption. Bhutan has a very small certified organic production for export (essential oil, medicinal herbs, and honey) but would like to develop it more. More importantly, Bhutan would like to develop the local market for organic products, both for the few (but rich!) tourists who are allowed to enter the country, and for the local population itself, for whom organic products should be affordable.



The Bhutanese Ministry of Agriculture has developed a national action plan for organic farming and is starting its implementation. The workshop was an opportunity to bring representatives of various public institutions (Ministry of Agriculture, extension services, research, etc) to discuss strategies to develop organic agriculture in the country. A big part of the workshop was about appropriate guarantee systems for organic agriculture in Bhutan and the regulation of the organic sector. The IFOAM delegates appreciated the energy of the Bhutanese government to promote organic agriculture, for example its approach that all extension services should propose organic solutions first, and non-organic solutions only if demanded by the farmers. IFOAM representatives were also critical of some of the components of the strategy, such as:

- The set-up of a compulsory national accreditation system for all certification bodies operating in Bhutan. The IFOAM team suggested keeping this very simple, in the form of a non-bureaucratic registration process, so as not to discourage CBs coming into Bhutan and to keep costs as low as possible.
- The development of a very detailed and comprehensive organic standard for Bhutan, based on all major international standards (IFOAM IBS + NOP + EU regulation + JAS + Indian national standard), which would become compulsory in Bhutan. The IFOAM team recommended that, for export, the easiest way was to let operators be certified against the regulation of the country they want to export to, and not add another burden on them. For the local market, the IFOAM team suggested to develop a very simple, locally adapted standard which would be easily understandable and relevant for the farmers.

IFOAM representatives also provided recommendations on how to develop PGS in Bhutan, and especially on how to involve stakeholders in the process. External advice was overall well received by the government representatives who committed to adjust the national strategy and keep working on the development of a diversified organic sector in Bhutan.