

Summary Overview of Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative (SJI) (as of May 2011)

- The Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative (SJI) is Bhutan's first major civil society-based development initiative, and was initiated by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche in March, 2010, as a potential model for the country. It aims to raise living standards in Samdrup Jongkhar dzongkhag (south-eastern Bhutan) in an ecologically friendly, self-reliant way that strengthens community and culture.
- For the initiative to succeed, it must have a strong research and evidence base to ensure that development actions are based in local realities and are not 'pie-in-the-sky' wishful thinking. This research is funded by the International Development Research Centre in Canada.
- To that end, a first draft 350-page **Samdrup Jongkhar Profile**, intended to serve as an encyclopaedic reference source, has just been completed by GPI Atlantic researchers stationed in Samdrup Jongkhar for the past 5 months. An executive summary and slide presentation are currently under preparation, to be presented to key government officials, analysts, and scholars on 19 May, 2011. In the coming 3-4 months, further research and feedback on the draft will refine the report, with the final profile expected to be released in September 2011.
- The Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative (SJI) was officially launched on 18-20 December, 2010, in the presence of more than 500 leading Samdrup Jongkhar residents, with keynote presentations by the Honourable Prime Minister of Bhutan, Dr. Vandana Shiva and Bunker Roy. A zero waste workshop was led by Jayakumar Chelaton and Shibu Nair of Thanal, Kerala. SJI is in the process of registering as a Civil Society Organization, after which it will be eligible for funding for development actions.
- The National Environment Commission has contributed Nu. 3,50,000/- to the Initiative.
- Organic farmer trainings in Samdrup Jongkhar were conducted by Navdanya, the Organic Farming Association of India, and the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women in December 2010 and February 2011. In March-April 2011, SJI, with funding from IDRC, organized a 3-week organic farming study tour of India for 20 Samdrup Jongkhar farmers from all 11 S/J gewogs (blocks), plus the District Agriculture Officer, three agriculture extension officers, and two representatives of the National Organic Program.
- As of May, 2011, two agriculture researchers have started to collect baseline data for a three-year research project to document Samdrup Jongkhar's transition to organic farming. They are working under the supervision of Dr. Vinod Bhatt of Navdanya, Dr. Derek Lynch of the Organic Agriculture College of Canada, Ministry of Agriculture scientists, and other key experts.

- On the education front, a GNH-based school curriculum is presently under development, and will be implemented at the Chokyi Gyatso Institute for Buddhist Studies in Dewathang, Samdrup Jongkhar in 2013. A proposal to create a Centre for Appropriate Technology at Jigme Namgyel Polytechnic in Samdrup Jongkhar has received preliminary approval from the Royal University of Bhutan. Bhutan Power Corporation has agreed to assist SJI in the area.
- SJI office is based in Dewathang, currently run by an agriculture coordinator and a coordination assistant.