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UN IN ACTION

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BHUTAN: TSUNAMI FROM THE SKY

VIDEO

CLOUDY HIMALAYAN PEAKS

VILLAGERS

VILLAGE FROM ABOVE

UGEY FAMILY

UGEY FARMS

AUDIO

NARRATION

For centuries, the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan has been cloaked in mysteries as dense as the clouds that swirl around its towering peaks. (9.5")

Today, in the lush valleys carved out of the mountains, live a people whose traditions remain uniquely intact in our globalized world. (9")

SINGING FROM ARCHERS

But high up in the mountains lurks a danger that could destroy this harmonious people and the lifestyles they have always enjoyed. People like 76-year-old Dzongpon Ugey. Like most of the Bhutanese population, he lives off the land – for the last 53 years, in this fertile valley of the Pho Chu river, in north western

Bhutan. (25.5")

UGEY ON CAMERA

DZONGPON UGEY: (Dzongkha) **M**

"My income is from agriculture only, and no other source. Rice, wheat, cabbage and chillies. We feed ourselves and sell the surplus." (10")

UGEY'S FAMILY FARMS

NARRATION

CLOUDY GLACIERS

Now all this is threatened. Beyond Dzongpon Ugey's house, up in the Himalayas, the glaciers are melting due to climate change. And Bhutan is facing a potential calamity. (14")

LAKES ON GLACIERS

As the glaciers melt, lakes are forming within the glaciers themselves. There are more than 2,600 glacial lakes in Bhutan and with the increase in the melt-water,

ANIMATION OF WATER MOVING IN VALLEYS

some are in imminent danger of bursting. If this happens, a wall of water would surge into the valley communities below, sweeping away everything and everyone in its course. (26")

DUKPA ON CAMERA

DOWCHU DUKPA: (English) **M**

"I think people term it as the tsunami from the sky." (2")

DUKPA SHOWS GLACIER MAP

NARRATION

Dowchu Dukpa, an engineer at the Bhutanese Ministry of Geology and Mines, has spent years monitoring the Thorthormi

glacier. (8.5”)

SATTELITE PICTURE OF GLACIER

DOWCHU DUKPA: (English) **M**
“If this whole glacier melts, which it will do in the course of time, that could create a worst-case scenario.” (5”)

UGEY AT HOME

NARRATION
A scenario Dzongpon Ugey fears. If the lake bursts, his house will be directly in its path. (9.5”)

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE OF FLOODED VILLAGE

A smaller glacial lake outburst flood has already happened in this valley. In 1994, twenty-eight people lost their lives when an adjoining lake burst, and many more lost their homes and livelihoods. This time, the wall of water could be three times higher. (20”)

PROJECTION OF WATER LEVEL INCREASE

AERIAL SHOT OF GLACIERS

So in August 2009, the Bhutanese government, supported by international organizations, launched an ambitious project to reduce the flood risk and protect the communities below. Claire Van der Vaeren is chief of the United Nations Development Programme in Bhutan. (18”)

VAN DER VAEREN IN OFFICE

VAN DER VAEREN ON CAMERA

VAN DER VAEREN: (English) **F**
“One project has been developed which aims to reduce the amount of water in one of the largest glacial lakes, Thorthormi Lake.” (9”)

VILLAGERS GATHER AND
REMOVE ROCKS FROM LAKE BY
HAND

NARRATION

The flagship project is staffed by local men and women. Working almost 5,000 metres up, conditions are severe – up to their knees in icy water, many working with nothing but their bare hands. (20”)

VAN DER VAEREN ON CAMERA

VAN DER VAEREN: (English) **F**

“The idea is that in the next three years they will be able to decrease the water level by five metres.” (7”)

VILLAGERS DRAIN LAKES

NARRATION

They carve out a drainage channel to gradually release the water. At the end of the first three months, water levels have already been reduced by about a half metre. Their labours seem to be working. (12.5”)

UGEY AND WIFE AT SHRINE

Meanwhile, Dzongpon Ugey, although appreciative of the efforts to preserve his future, believes that some additional spiritual help to protect him and his family won’t go amiss. (11”)

He and his wife go to the nearby town of Punakha, for an annual blessing ceremony by the Head Lama. (6”)

CROWD AT SHRINE

DZONGPON UGEY: (Dzongkha) **M**

“As the old Bhutanese saying goes ‘Your real enemy is fire or water’ – nobody can

UGEY'S VILLAGE

defeat them. It is our fate and we have to live with it." (10")

UN LOGO

NARRATION

This report was produced by Gill Fickling for the United Nations.