



UNITED NATIONS NATIONS UNIES

U.N. IN ACTION

Week of 19 July 2004

Programme No. 914

Duration: 3'50"

BUILDING COMMUNITY SCHOOLS FOR RURAL BHUTANESE CHILDREN

VIDEO

AUDIO

NARRATION

HOUSES IN HIGH MOUNTAIN
(10")

In Bhutan, villages are often just a couple of houses perched in high mountains. There are no roads, and schools are far away.

CHILDREN TREKKING DOWN
MOUNTAIN (9")

Rural children eager to learn, walk hours to get to the nearest schools. In many cases, it can take three hours to get to class.

PEM WALKING WITH FRIENDS
(8")

Fifteen-year-old Wangchuk Pem, a sixth grader, feels lucky. She walks only an hour and a half, and leaves home after sunrise.

PEM:

PEM ON CAMERA
(7")

"I get up at five thirty-five, I wash my face and get dressed. I do some studies, then I go to school."

NARRATION

CHILDREN GOING UP STEPS,
RINGING GONG ETC. (12")

Going to school is regarded as a privilege in remote communities. Bhutan started with only five hundred children in primary school in the early 1960s.

STUDENTS IN CLASS (12")

Today over seventy percent of children are enrolled. The ones left behind are often those in rural areas, particularly the girls.

ANOJA (6")

Representative of the UN Children's Fund, UNICEF in Bhutan, Anoja Wijeyesekera.

WIJYESEKERA:

ANOJA ON CAMERA (15")

"That is not due to any type of discrimination, but it's because of the long distances that little girls have to walk. Mothers don't want to expose their daughters to the hazards of walking across the treacherous mountain terrain.

NARRATION

SCHOOL, CHILDREN
(10")

One strategy to enhance rural school enrolment, and especially attendance of girls, is to construct community schools in remote areas. This reduces walking distances.

CHILDREN GARDENING
(17")

Pem's school is inside a national park. It's part of the network of community primary schools supported by UNICEF. Started with thirty students, it now has nearly 150. Over half of them are girls.

CHLDREN IN CLASS
(18")

NARRATION

Most spend on average one to two hours to get to school. But there is another problem. Many come without eating breakfast, or bringing a bag lunch. Although food shortage is not an issue in this tiny nation of less than one million people, their parents find it difficult to prepare meals in the early morning.

DORJI (2")

The school principal, Kinley Dorji.

DORJI ON CAMERA (9")

DORJI:

“When they reach school, they cannot concentrate on studies because they are hungry. And then sometimes they get sick.”

STUDENTS LINING UP FOR
LUNCH (9")

NARRATION

Two years ago, the school started a programme of free meals. Supported by the World Food Programme, WFP, the children receive a light breakfast and a hot lunch.

STUDENTS EATING LUNCH
(8")

As a result, student performance has improved. School enrolment has increased 15 percent in the past two years.

CHILDREN WALKING TO HUTS,
FOLDING CLOTHES
(12")

The school also admits nearly fifty informal boarders. They are students who live more than three hours away. Their parents built huts next to the school where the children can stay during the week.

NARRATION

CHILDREN IN HUTS (7")

Some are as young as seven. They look after each other after school. They cook their own dinners and go home on the weekends.

PEM WALKING (9")

Pem is lucky. She can go home every day. She likes to go to school. It gives her the opportunity to study and be with her friends.

CHILDREN LIGHTING CANDLE
TO STUDY (21")

Despite the difficult conditions, rural Bhutanese children are seizing every opportunity to study. The government, with international help, is striving to make primary education accessible to everyone by 2015. The goal is to make education a basic right, rather than a privilege.

UN LOGO (10")

This report was prepared by Patricia Chan for the United Nations.