

**Thirteenth Round Table Meeting between Royal Government of Bhutan  
and  
Development Partners  
Thimphu, 15-16 March 2016  
Statement of the Delegation of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation**

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Excellencies, Dashos, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

1. HELVETAS has been a development partner to Bhutan for more than 40 years. The partnership is built on deep personal relationships and mutual respect. We take pride in being a partner to the country's significant achievements in the fields of education, infrastructure, rural economic development, and more recently, vocational skills training and decentralisation and local governance.

2. Bhutan has achieved several of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and has made the same commitments towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Deepening decentralized democracy and supporting the growing role of the civil society and the private sector are also clear priorities for the country. Challenges of growing importance are rural-urban differences in poverty rates although urban poverty is also now becoming a topic of concern, youth unemployment and associated issues of lack of quality and mismatch in the relevance of skills training, the still limited growth of the private sector, and the fact that civil society organizations are, in many ways, still emerging and growing in their roles in a democracy. The 11<sup>th</sup> plan has recognized these challenges, and the national key result areas of the forthcoming 12<sup>th</sup> plan also suggest that these topics will receive attention.

3. I am pleased to reaffirm HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation's commitment to remain engaged in Bhutan as the country moves forward in its development process. I am personally very happy about the continued cooperation between Bhutan and Switzerland despite SDC' decision to phase out from Bhutan. Keeping in mind the above mentioned challenges in the country and the priorities in the 12<sup>th</sup> plan, our focus in the next five years will be on skills training and entrepreneurship, and local governance and decentralization, thus contributing to the National Key Result Areas 3, 7, 10, 11 and 13.

4. Looking at these two areas of intervention, it is natural that we seek to continue our excellent partnership with the government and also to engage with the private sector more than we have done in the past. Investing in vocational skills will eventually not make as much difference as we would like if potential employers from the private sector are not engaged in, for example, apprenticeships. The same with civil society, including farmer groups and cooperatives, and local NGOs. These organized forms of civil society are an integral part of a democracy.

5. We are happy to note that the 12<sup>th</sup> five year plan will look into qualitative aspects of development, and into results based management, and data gaps. Lessons from the 11<sup>th</sup> five year plan mid-term review also show the need to give attention to these topics. These are issues we face during implementation of our programme.

6. HELVETAS welcomes the objective of the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan for a Just, Harmonious and Sustainable Society through enhanced decentralization. We stay committed for the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan period with our development experiences and expertise in the fields of vocational skills training and entrepreneurship, and local governance and decentralization, and, most importantly, building on our more than 4 decades of successful partnership.

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation thanks the Royal Government of Bhutan for the excellent preparation and arrangements for this Round Table Meeting. We would like to take this opportunity to wish the people of Bhutan the very best for the future.

Thank you and Tashi Delek

Thimphu, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016