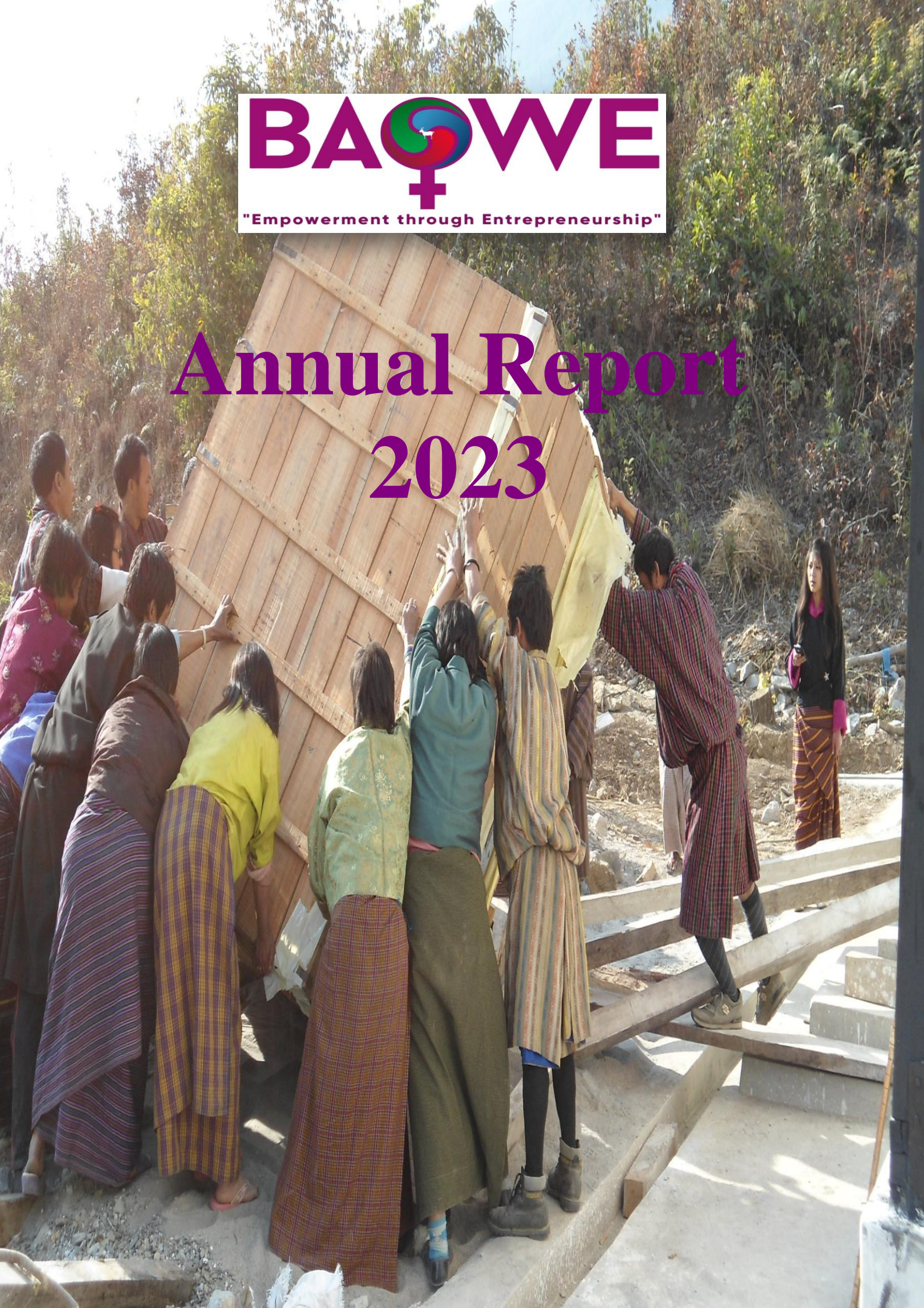




**BAQWE**

"Empowerment through Entrepreneurship"

# Annual Report 2023









Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs (BAOWE) received the National Order of Merit (Gold) from His Majesty the King during the 109th National Day Celebrations in the year 2016

## **BHUTAN ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS (BAOWE)**

Annual Report 2023



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As we embark on this annual reflection, I am filled with profound gratitude for the tireless dedication and unwavering support of our donors, partners, and team members. Your commitment has been the cornerstone of our success, driving us forward in our mission to empower grassroots communities across Bhutan.

Over the course of 14 years, BAOWE has worked to empower grassroots communities, touching the lives of over 18,000 direct and indirect project beneficiaries in almost all the Dzongkhags. Our focus on livelihood creation has been instrumental in fostering sustainable development and economic resilience in both rural and urban areas.



In 2023, with the generous support of various donors, BAOWE has been able to initiate and execute a wide range of projects to empower grassroots rural entrepreneur women. Significant milestones were achieved, impacting over 15,000 beneficiaries across Bhutan through various initiatives. Despite challenges, BAOWE's focus on livelihood creation, microfinance services, and community engagement remained unwavering.

This year, BAOWE had made notable achievements for the rural community by enhancing market visibility for their indigenous foods and produce during the Sustainable Regional Food Program held in Thimphu. This initiative was conducted in collaboration with the Department of Industry, Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Employment (MOICE), along with other relevant stakeholders.

The BAOWE Pelzhing Microfinance program continues to support Grassroots Rural Entrepreneurs Women (GREW) in accessing finance, while Ugen Bjongchubcholing preserves old religious scripts in digital form. The main funding source for BAOWE is Pelden Enterprise Private Limited, through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CRS) received, enabling us to carry out the organization's daily activities. Through these efforts, we have continued to provide vital financial assistance to grassroots rural entrepreneurs, particularly women. The support from Pelden Enterprise Private Limited has been instrumental in facilitating our daily operations and ensuring the seamless execution of our projects.

Finally, I extend heartfelt appreciation to our donors, partners, supporters, volunteers, and well-wishers for your unwavering commitment to our cause of bringing positive change to the lives of disadvantaged members of communities in Bhutan. As we set our sights on the future, I urge all our stakeholders to continue their invaluable support for BAOWE. Your contributions are indispensable in enabling us to continue our mission of fostering positive change and empowering communities across Bhutan

Jamyang Mipham Yuelgyal

# Background on Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs

## About BAOWE

The Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs (BAOWE) was founded by Aum Damchae Dem, the Chairperson of Pelden Group of Companies, and was formally registered as a Public Benefit Organization on 15th April 2010 under the Bhutan CSO Act 2007. BAOWE aims to reach out to underserved members of society, primarily single mothers, those in the unorganized sector, and unemployed youth.

The organization focuses on developing women's capacities and providing related support services to enable women entrepreneurs to run profitable businesses. By doing so, BAOWE facilitates support and recognizes the self-worth of women, helping them discover their strengths and lead more meaningful and dignified lives.

BAOWE serves as an enabling platform for 'hidden' women entrepreneurs to realize their potential and thrive in a competitive business environment. The organization encourages women to do things differently, successfully, and profitably.

## Mission

To promote sustainable and equitable opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

## Vision

To promote a conducive environment for sustainable and equitable opportunities of women Entrepreneurs.

## Values

Empowering, Sustainable, Equitable.





## Key Initiatives

The Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs (BAOWE) has launched two pivotal initiatives to support and empower Grassroots Rural Entrepreneurs Women (GREW).

### BAOWE Pure Collective Mark/Certification

The BAOWE Pure Collective Mark/Certification initiative addresses significant challenges faced by rural farmers, such as the lack of robust marketing networks and the difficulty in obtaining international certifications. These certifications are essential for making trade inclusive both domestically and internationally.

By certifying products with the BAOWE Pure Collective Mark, the initiative helps women gain market recognition, ensure product standards, and enhance consumer trust, thereby boosting sales and marketability.



The Green Circle signifies **Green circular economy**, uplifting primary producers into Social Entrepreneurs.

The White lotus signifies **Purity of product**.

The Pink border signifies the product is **Women Owned**.

The White Goat signifies **Strong Rootsconnecting past traditions with modern technology**.

#### **The Five petals signify:**

**Sustainable:** The products are grown processed and marketed by its members.

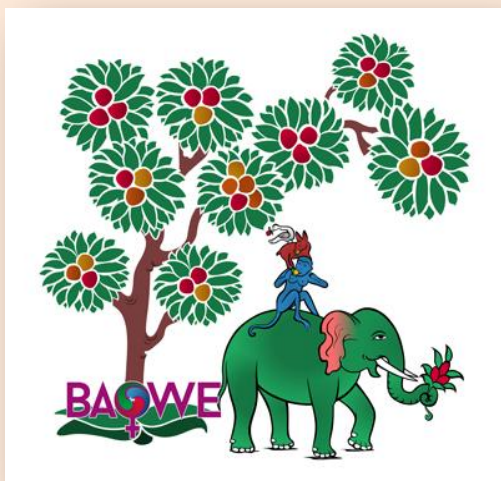
**Transparent:** The product belongs to self help groups that monitor themselves and BAOWE.

**Inclusive:** The group consists of interested members of the community.

**Ethical:** with little to no intervention of middle men the members receive their fair share.

**Traceable:** The entrepreneurs have individual seals maintained by BAOWE.

### BAOWE Pelzhing Micro Finance Program



**BAOWE-Pelzhing Micro Finance** provides affordable credit and essential financial services to underserved communities in Bhutan, focusing on grassroots rural entrepreneurs, women, and small businesses. By offering low-interest loans and quick processing times, we empower these groups to start and expand their businesses while avoiding predatory lending. Our approach includes providing tailored financial guidance, securing loans through a community-based guarantor system, and ensuring access to banking services even in remote areas. Through strategic support and innovative solutions, BAOWE-Pelzhing is helping to bridge financial gaps and foster sustainable economic growth in Bhutan.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

BAOWE focuses on empowering underserved communities, particularly women, through initiatives such as microfinance services, entrepreneurship training, financial literacy education, market access support, value-added initiatives, and community development projects. By providing access to resources, knowledge, and opportunities, the programme aims to foster sustainable economic growth, alleviate poverty, and enhance the overall well-being of communities in the region.

Value Addition Units have been a primary focus of BAOWE since its inception, with a steadfast commitment to establishing these facilities. Strategically located across various regions, these units play a pivotal role in empowering Self-Help Groups (SHGs) through fostering collaboration and collective efforts. This initiative not only addresses labor shortages within communities but also empowers SHGs to enhance the value of their produce, resulting in better prices, extended shelf life, and improved market access.

In 2023, BAOWE established Processing Units in Ura and Tang, Bumthang, with the generous grant support from USAID through the Bhutan Foundation, alongside contributions from Gewog Administration and BAOWE. This endeavor exemplifies the collaborative spirit among stakeholders, including the Gewog Administration and other stakeholders, working together towards community development

## 1. Ura Bucketwheat Processing Unit



The processing unit in Ura, Bumthang, represents a pivotal development for the community, promising to positively impact over 100 households by facilitating the production of buckwheat flour and other derived products. Funded by a USAID grant through the Bhutan Foundation, the project saw the collaborative efforts of BAOWE and the gewog administration in constructing the unit.

This initiative not only serves as a catalyst for expanding buckwheat cultivation among community members but also fosters economic growth and stability. Beyond boosting income, the project promotes empowerment and self-reliance, strengthening the community's foundation and enhancing overall prosperity.

Additionally, by creating local job opportunities and supporting sustainable agricultural practices, the processing unit contributes to the long-term resilience and development of the region.



## 2. Tang Processing Unit



The processing unit in Babzur, Tang gewog, Bumthang, impacts the entire buckwheat-producing community of Tang gewog. This unit adds value to middle path buckwheat flour and other derived products.

The establishment of this value-add unit not only enhances the immediate income of SHG members but also contributes to the long-term sustainability of their livelihoods.

By diversifying income sources and building market linkages, SHGs are better positioned to withstand economic fluctuations and improve their overall well-being.

The machines for this unit were funded by Pelden Enterprises Ltd. as part of their CSR initiative to BAOWE, with the gewog administration overseeing the construction of the unit.





### **3. Bringing the Product to the Tourist through Annual Thimphu Tsechu Food Fair**

Bhutan's high-value, low-volume tourism initiative necessitates careful planning by guests, who often find the prospect of spending valuable time on the road unappealing due to the lack of adequate amenities. These challenges have deterred tourists from exploring the target Dzongkhags. Recognizing this issue, BAOWE leveraged the Sustainable Food initiative under Project SHINE to address these concerns by inviting participants from seven target Dzongkhags to Thimphu Tsechu Fair ‘Bringing the product to tourist’.

The Sustainable Regional Food Program, held during the Thimphu Tsechu to celebrate the birth of Her Royal Highness Gyalsem Sonam Yangdoen Wangchuck, has evolved into a significant annual event in Bhutan. Organized by the Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs (BAOWE) in collaboration with the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Employment (MOICE), this program aims to promote Bhutanese indigenous food, enhance culinary skills, and provide economic opportunities for rural communities.

The success of the program can be attributed to the wholehearted support received from various stakeholders, including MOICE, Thimphu Thromde, local government authorities, and the communities. This collaborative effort played a pivotal role in ensuring the smooth execution and positive outcomes of the initiative.

The program generated significant financial benefits for farmers, transporters, and vendors involved in the supply chain. Farmers supplying ingredients for the indigenous cuisines, transporters carrying produce from farms to the event venue, and vendors providing food along the highway all experienced economic gains. Additionally, costs associated with accommodations, transportation, and logistics, including Bolero costs, food expenses on the highway, hotel expenses, and tent rentals, injected capital into the local economy. Despite the simplicity of the activity, its impact on stimulating the economy was far-reaching.





Stakeholder meeting chaired by Hon'ble Secretary Dasho Tashi Wangmo along with Senior Officials from the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment including Department of Tourism and other relevant agencies



Meeting with the Thimphu Thromde Officials, including officials from the Department of Trade





The Sustainable Regional Food Program, held from September 23rd to September 26th, 2023, coincided with the Thimphu Tsechu, a national festival celebrated in Thimphu. The program attracted participants from seven target Dzongkhags, comprising 21 females and 10 males.





Awareness workshop on food hygiene, safety requirements and handling for the participants by Bhutan Agriculture Food Regulatory Authority (BAFRA)





**On 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2023-** Inauguration of the Sustainable Regional Food Program by Hon'ble Chairperson of the National Council, Royal Government of Bhutan





Hon'ble President, BAOWE, Jamyang Mipham Yuelgyal Rinpochey graced the Sustainable Regional Food Program





**On 27<sup>th</sup> September, 2023-** Exposure visits to local markets and producer sites such as CSI market, Start-up Center and Centenary Farmers Market.



BAOWE as an informal platform addressing the economic and social needs of its member is being stretched beyond capacity. The need for a formal platform addressing these issues within BAOWE is an urgent impetus that can no longer be ignored. We need financial and technical support in building this platform and invite interested individuals and institutions to help us in this meaningful endeavor.

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**TO DONATE**

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