



Targeted Intervention Program for the Preservation of the Traditional Himalayan Buddhist Culture and Customs: A Case Study of Ananda Sangh, Kathmandu

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Abstract

The main goal of Buddhist education is to free individuals from all forms of limitations and suffering. In Nepal's Gumbas, this education helps shape students' personalities based on Buddhist values. It focuses on improving ethical, intellectual, and spiritual qualities. Buddhist education encourages wisdom, kindness, fairness, rational thinking, and a sense of commitment. The main objective of this study is to access the targeted intervention (TI) program conducted by Ananda Sangh for the poor, needy, marginalized people and social institutions, especially in Jagadol, Budhanilkantha-11, Kathmandu, Nepal and communities surrounding Pullahari Monastery. Beneficiaries (Especially Monks) and observation were used to ascertain primary information whereas secondary data were collected from different project reports, published unpublished progress reports or literature and Social Welfare Evaluation Reports. Despite this, the team has done a FGD with Ananda Sangh staff and community people for data collection from the field and for triangulation. The intervention of Ananda Sangh educating 230 monks has been found to support the fundamental right of receiving quality education of the marginalized people of Nepal. However, Ananda Sangh Nepal has not yet been conducted formal social audit in the areas where it has implemented its program. The exploration of gap between policy and practice is the main area of research. What is it? Why is it a problem? And the need of any further intervention solving the current issues facing by the monks is also the target of the study. This study was conducted by the researcher during Dec 2023 and January 2024 with frequent visits to the study area.

Keywords: Preservation, monks, beneficiaries, organization, effectiveness



Introduction

The Buddha was a human being. As a man he was born, as a Buddha he lived, and as a Buddha his life came to an end (Koenig, 2024). Though human, he became an extraordinary man owing to his unique characteristics. The Buddha laid stress on this important point, and left no room for anyone to fall into the error of thinking that he was an immortal being (deathless). It has been said of him that there was no religious teacher who was “ever so godless as the Buddha, yet none was so god-like (Ziporyn, 2024).” On the other hand, Buddhism is one of the most well-known religions and ideologies having a significant impact on the growth and nature of Asian civilization from the past to the present (Mahathera, 1964).

In countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia, Buddhism remains the dominant belief system. It has reshaped communities by challenging social hierarchies, offering opportunities for women, and involving people from all classes in spiritual practices. In India, Buddhism significantly influenced political, social, religious, and cultural life. It promoted equality, opposed caste discrimination and social oppression, and empowered women by making education and religion more accessible to them (Paul, 1986; Vann Norrem, 2023). A question critical to the future of program evaluation is whether useful generalization is indeed possible regarding the factors involved in social intervention and how they interrelate to produce beneficial effects for the target individuals and populations (Adelman & Taylor 1994).

There is an important complementarity between the evaluation of individual programs and the strength and completeness of the knowledge base regarding social intervention. The development of explanatory models of program behavior derived through the cumulation and synthesis of empirical findings would allow evaluators to direct their attention to assessing whether programs operate in a fashion consistent with effective practice (Lipesy et al. 2000).

Thomas and Lamm (2012) address the question of how a firm can be successful at integrating sustainability concerns into strategic and operational decision-making processes while still meeting its traditional business goals. They elaborate on a conceptual model based on Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior (1985, 1991) that operates at the individual managerial level. Their conceptual model indicates that the perceived legitimacy of sustainability, as applied to firms, can affect managers’ intentions to incorporate sustainability into decision-making processes.

The constitution of Nepal promulgated in 2015 AD has acknowledged that Nepal as a secular and inclusive federal state. It has bequeathed the right to freedom of religion stating that every person with specific faith in any religion have the right to profess, practice and protect the religion according to the conviction. Besides, every religious denomination has been guaranteed the right to operate and protect its religious sites and religious Guthi (Simkhada et al., 2015).

The census of Nepal (2012) has enlisted Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Kirat, Christianity, Prakriti, Bon, Jainism, Bahai and Sikhism as the major religions of Nepal. Hinduism is followed by 81.3%, (21,551,492) of the population while Buddhism 9.0% , (2,396,099), Islam 4.4%, (1,162,370), Kirat 3.1%, (807,169), Christianity 1.4%, (375,699), Prakriti 0.5%,



(121,982), Bon (13,006), Jainism (3,214), Bahai (1,283), Sikhism (609). In Nepal, a number of monasteries in different parts of the country with different denominations have been dedicated to the preservation, promotion and development of the Buddhist culture, tradition and religion with the managerial and financial support (Viz. indigenous and foreign) of non-governmental organization.

Nepal's National Cultural Policy is pluralistic, encompassing various cultural groups such as religion, place, ethnicity, and historical civilizations, claiming they collectively form the nation's culture (Divasa et al., 2007).

With a view to the preservation, promotion and propagation of the Buddha Dharma, Ananda Sangh aims to construct, establish and administer monasteries (Gumbas) devoted to Lord Buddha and to publicise the teachings of Buddhism. For the attainment of the aforementioned objectives, establishing and administering necessary libraries, reading rooms, press and publication units, launching similar other programs, publish necessary journals, books, magazines, bulletins with an objective to make the general public aware of the teachings of Buddhism. Supporting and administering hospitals, clinics, dispensaries, health centers, veterinary hospitals, settlement for refugees, orphanages, and rehabilitation centers for the benefit of poor, disabled and destitute persons and to provide such person scholarships, loans and economic assistance. Further, it assists to establish and administer educational institutions such as schools, campuses, research centers etc.). In short, Ananda Sangh aims at establishing and administering Buddhist Gumbas in Nepal and engaging social projects for the benefit to the destitute, poor and needy in the areas of health and education; community services; environmental care and preservation; promotion of traditional Himalayan culture and animal welfare (Ananda Sangh, 2077 BS).

This project entitled Ananda Sangh Projects for Preservation of Traditional Himalayan Buddhist Culture and Customs and Social Benefits (hereafter, Ananda Sangh project) was carried out by Ananda Sangh as an ongoing project for one year (17 July 2022 to 16th July 2023) as per the project agreement signed between the Social Welfare Council (SWC) and Ananda Sangh Nepal. The cost of the project as per approval was NRs. 38,784,916.64). This project was implemented in one location, viz Budhanilkantha-11, Kathmandu. The PTHBCC project has been mainly concentrated in the six major interventions/programs. They include Program for monks, Pullahari Regular and Emergency Medicare, Pujas (Regular and Special), Rigpe Dorje Institute, Building and Facilities Maintenance Repair, (including Boundary walls) and Social Projects (Project Agreement, 2023).

Nepal as the country of birth of the Buddha as well as the activities to make Lumbini a main Centre of pilgrimage are also results of this interest in the past as is the fact that many Theravada (major Buddhist tradition philosophy like Siddhartha Gautama) authors refer to the importance of the Sakyas who formed the first Buddhist nation in an area which is now part of Nepal. Asoka not only represents the model of a righteous king, but also is said in his lifetime to have shown an extra interest in Nepal. In this connection the stupas of Patan which tradition attributes to Asoka are mentioned, as well as the memorial pillars erected by him in Lumbini



and Kapilvastu and Carumati Vihara (Chabahil) built according to tradition by his daughter Carumati. The important place given to the laity (religious organization) is also a feature of Nepalese Theravada. (Tewari, R. C. (1983).

Nepal's Access to Education program has significantly contributed to the country's sustainable development goals (SDG), promoting youth and gender equality, social inclusion, and better education for the young generation (Buchy & Shakya, 2023).

In this respect, the following research questions are generated:

1. What is the role of Ananda Sangh (Organization) to preserve traditional, Himalayan Buddhist Culture and Custom (PTHBCC) in Nepal.
2. To know the targeted intervention (TI) program conducted by Ananda Sangh for the poor, needy, marginalized people and social institutions especially in Jagadol, Budhanilkantha-11 and communities surrounding Pullahari Monastery.

Methods and Materials

The study was based on the results of a mixed method design conducted by the researcher between 2080/09/01 to 080/09/29 with frequent visits of the study area. The study made use of both the primary and secondary sources to substantiate the facts were collected and more qualitative data analysis was used for data analysis and interpretation. The research design was applied to case study of Ananda Sangh(Social Organization) in Budhanilkantha-11, Kathmandu, Nepal.

The study employed both descriptive and exploratory research designs. Data collection strategies included key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGD) with senior lamas, subject experts, school teachers, board members, the chief administrator, and local elected representatives. Beneficiaries, particularly monks, were also consulted, and observations were conducted to gather primary data. Secondary information was obtained from various sources, including project reports, published and unpublished progress reports, relevant literature, and social welfare evaluation reports.

Explorative studies are conducted to investigate new or less understood areas, aiming to uncover the full nature of a phenomenon and its related factors. In this research, the impact of the Ananda Sangh projects on preserving traditional Himalayan Buddhist culture, customs, and social benefits was examined through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). Descriptive research, on the other hand, provides an accurate representation of a situation as it naturally occurs. In this study, descriptive research was used to outline the general socio-cultural background of the program. The sampling method for selecting the study site and key informant interviews (KII) was purposive. A 20% sampling ratio was applied, resulting in the selection of 46 respondents from a total of 230 monks for primary data collection.

After the data was completed, it was carefully checked for its completeness and accuracy. The collected data in Nepali language has been translated in its original sense in English. Translated information has been discussed comparing with the relevant literatures to get the answer of the research questions. The obtained data were edited, coded and organized before entry into the computer. The computer program statistical package for social science



(SPSS) version 20 was used for data entry and analysis. Further, the obtained data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods like frequency, mean, mead, mode, percentage etc.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the achievement has been made by Ananda Sangh toward the poor, needy, marginalized people, social institutions especially in Jagadol, Budhanilkantha-11 and communities surrounding Pullahari Monastery and to preserve traditional, Himalayan Buddhist Culture and Custom (PTHBCC) because the constitution of Nepal promulgated in 2015 AD has acknowledged that Nepal as a secular and inclusive federal state. It has bequeathed the right to freedom of religion stating that every person with specific faith in any religion have the right to profess, practice and protect the religion according to the conviction. Besides, every religious denomination has been guaranteed the right to operate and protect its religious sites and religious Guthi. This study was focused to examine the major indicators/assumptions such as relevancy, efficiency, effectiveness, SDG Goal (Sustainable Goal)2015, GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) and inputs, outputs, outcomes, impact of project implementation, dated during 17 July 2022 to 16th July 2023. Similarly, changes of the lives of beneficiaries, especially monks through project interventions have been presented below:

Targeted Intervention Program (TI)

Table 1: Targeted Intervention Program (TI)

S.N.	Program / Activities	Major Intervention
1	Program for Monks	Welfare and education of 230 monks, the maintenance of Pullahari Monastery and, the fulfilment of requests for prayers by sponsors worldwide.
2	Pullahari Regular	Regular welfare, education, hygiene, medicare of 230 monks at Pullahari Monastery.
3	Emergency Medicare	Emergency medical care of 230 monks including diagnoses, specialist treatments, hospitalisation, medications etc. due to illnesses, chronic ailments, accidents etc.
4	Regular Pujas	Daily, weekly, monthly and annual pujas and prayers dedicated to all sentient beings, peace in Nepal and the world. Offerings to regular pujas support the welfare and education of monks and maintenance of the monastery and temples.
5	Special Pujas	Pujas and prayers dedicated at the request of sponsors to fulfil their wishes and needs. The offerings received go towards the cost of the pujas and the support of activities of Pullahari Monastery.
6	Rigpe Dorje Institute:	



(a)	Rigpe Dorje Study and Meditation Centre (for retreat)	Development of personal insight into the Buddhist path through guided retreats by qualified Lamas.
(b)	Rigpe Dorje Library, Archive and Publication	Collection and preservation of Buddhist texts for references and study for the benefit of Buddhist monks, nuns, lay disciples and students today and those in the future.
7	Building Maintenance and Repairs	The monastery where 230 monks live, and the temples and places of activity are maintained at a current acceptable standard.
8	Facilities Maintenance and Repairs	Facility equipment and systems servicing the buildings, drainage systems and the surrounding grounds of the monastery and temples are of a current acceptable standard
10	Social Projects:	
(a)	Treatable Blindness Program	Alleviation of cataract among poor and needy especially in remote areas where cataract treatment is unavailable. As at May 11, 2023, the total number screened to date is 72,539 and 6,613 were given free cataract surgeries and intra-ocular lens implants.
(b)	Community Projects for Education and Health	The aims are to help: (1) provide opportunity for education for all children including the poor and needy and those in remote rural areas, and (2) maintain adequate standard and quality of healthcare in the community.
(c)	Community Emergency Relief	Support community residents in time of need due to health problems, natural disaster etc. Also promotes good and harmonious relationship between Pullahari Monastery, Jagadol and surrounding communities.
(d)	Supplementary Income Relief	Extension of assistance to youth for their education.

Source: Field Study, 2024.

Ananda Sangh has specified some specific interventions in order to fulfill the specific objectives of the projects and their implementation process. Table 1 presents interventions/ program/ projects focused on three major themes Viz., education, health and community development. The projects of the organization have been highly valued by the beneficiaries. For example, Ananda Sangh has played a significant role in changing the lifestyle of beneficiaries as today's world is heavily influenced by digital tools and technology. Resources



such as libraries, digital platforms are what they require to prosper in the digital era to make a positive contribution to a more inclusive and progressive society.

Ananda Sangh's project has empowered the beneficiaries allowing them to express themselves freely, and creatively, share their stories, have more confidence, be informed and aware of various social norms and break social barriers.

This Program is an ongoing project. More than **230** monks from the remote and marginalized communities have been provided a quality basic education in the monastery. They have also been provided lodging, fooding and health facilities. Besides, the organization has been providing with the treatment of cataract of people from the marginalized communities in collaboration with Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology. The organization is providing meditational trainings to foreigners and natives based on Buddhist philosophy.

Table 2: Summary of the impact of major domains and major interventions of the Ananda Sangh project in Nepal

S.N.	Major domains	Major interventions	Impact Summary
1	Welfare Of monks	Lodging and Fooding to Monks	More than 230 monks from marginalized communities from different districts have been enjoying dignified life with the lodging and fooding on behalf of Pullahari Monastery.
		Education	More than 230 monks from marginalized communities from different districts have been getting a quality education of Bhot Bhasa, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science and English in the monastery.
		Heath Care	More than 230 monks from marginalized communities from health different districts have been getting a quality health care which has been reflected in the educational performance.
		Regular and Special Puja	It has created a very positive attitude in the monks in learning Buddhist philosophy and practices of Mahayana Denomination. Besides, it has strengthened the devotion to Lord Buddha and the ways of life shown by Him.
2	Rigpe Dorje Institute	Rigpe Dorje Program	Promotion of the importance of teachings and instructions on Buddhist philosophy, meditation and practices in the international arena.



		Rigpe Dorje Study Mediation Center	Promotion of the importance of personal and group retreats focused on study and meditation practices of the Vajrayan tradition to engaged Buddhists of home and abroad
		Rigpe dorje library, archive and publication	Monks, Lamas as well as the Buddhist students and practitioners have been highly benefited from the collection of Buddhist books, texts and audio-visual materials, achieved resources and other published materials.
3	Social projects	Health care and support to school	Needy cataract patients from remote rural areas have been fully recovered and more than 35 pupils of Shree Jana Jagriti Secondary School's private nursery and kindergarten have achieved a quality education

Source: Field Study, 2024.

Projects like welfare program for monks, Rigpe Dorje program and social projects are targeted to the Buddhist students as well as monastic students conducted by Ananda Sangh, Kathmandu since 17 July 2022 to 16th July 2023. Table 2 shows the impact or the actual outcomes of the targeted interventions to the Buddhist students or monastic students. The capacity of participants in terms of knowledge skills use of the programs had enabled local people and government school students to put their issues at the time of field visit. The project has got positive impact in the lives and motivation of the children or poor, socially disadvantaged where the activities are being implemented. There has been more contribution of the project on changing effective service delivery from education, technical skills, knowledge gaining and advocating monk's stories. More than 230 boys who were deprived of education have been provided the access of education. This is indeed the immediate impact of the project. These monks definitely will lead a respectful life after they complete the course. The marginalized communities from the remote parts of Nepal will benefit from the educational programs for the monks in the monastery. This is indeed the mid-term impact of the project. In the long run, the project will be able to preserve traditional Himalayan Buddhist culture and customs and provide social benefit. Such project will definitely contribute to maintain peace in the country as well as in the world.

Table 3: Activities wise target vs Achievements

SN	Activities	Target	Achievement	Achieved Per %
1	Program For Monks	230	230	100%
2	Pullahari Regular	230	230	100%
3	Emergency Medicare	230	0	0%
4	Regular Pujas	230	230	100%



5	Special Pujas	500	205	41%
6	Rigpe Dorje Institute	50	36	72%
7	Rigpe Dorje Library, Archive & Publication	270	310	115%
8	(Social Project) Free Remote Outreach Cataract Program	350	373	107%
9	Community Project for Education and Health	1,200	1,703	142%
10	Community Emergency Relief	600	3	1%
11	Supplementary Income Relief	1	1	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 3 presents that the target vs achievements from Rigpe Dorje Program, socio-cultural program, welfare program, health projects and community development program have not been fully satisfactorily achieved. However, the achievement has targeted beneficiaries and related stakeholders to have enhanced capacity of target group. Especially the 230 monks/students have been found supporting the fundamental right of receiving quality education of the people in Nepal.

Conclusion

The study concluded based on factors like relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, impact, transparency, and achievements. The projects were found to be relevant and positively influenced the lives of 230 monks. The interventions effectively preserved traditional Himalayan Buddhist culture and customs while improving community's quality of life, particularly in Jagadol, Budhanilkantha-11. They also supported poor, needy, and marginalized groups through collaborative efforts with local and international donors. Key impacts included advancements in education, health, and the preservation of Himalayan religion and culture, with progress evident in measurable indicators. The projects enhanced the capacity of target groups and raised awareness of issues affecting monks and Buddhist students. Most participants in the focus group discussions (FGD) expressed satisfaction with the project's performance. However, Ananda Sangh did not conduct social audits to ensure transparency and failed to address gender equity and equality.

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