

# Pay & Plant Program

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## Introduction

Climate change is the biggest threat and greatest opportunity that humanity is presented within modern history. Elsewhere in the world, various technological innovations are underway to combat it. But nothing is as close to the impact of planting trees. Most recently, climate scientists, practitioners and policymakers agree that planting 1 billion trees is an effective solution, amongst others. In 2019, the UN endorsed Nature Based Solutions (NBS) as one of the key pillars in fighting climate change sending a strong policy signal to the international community. The science behind this is that plants take in CO<sub>2</sub> from the open air, and turn it into biomass, through a process known as photosynthesis process. This locks up the CO<sub>2</sub> in the tree for a number of years and helps reducing the impacts of climate change.

Although Bhutan has impressive forest cover that contributes to the global fight against climate change, this particular recognition of plantation as a solution presents unique approach and opportunities to realize self-responsibility and commitment to contribute to climate change mitigation. GBCL, as the corporation, this program will provide an opportunity to expand the plantation program with committed funds. This could be one of the right approaches to involve individuals and address climate change while addressing other issues such as biodiversity loss and catchment protection at the local level.

"Pay and Plant" is an innovative and immersive ecotourism program designed to engage tourists visiting the picturesque landscapes of Bhutan in active climate change mitigation

and environmental conservation efforts. This program aims to harness the power of tourism to promote tree planting, raise awareness about the benefits of afforestation, contribute to carbon sequestration, and explore private financing opportunities for sustainable plantation initiatives. By combining tourism with ecological responsibility, "Pay and Plant" strives to enhance Bhutan's reputation as a leader in environmental conservation and promote ecotourism as a force for positive change.

## **Objectives**

The main objectives of this program are to:

- Encourage individuals to participate in self-funded climate change mitigation program;
- Contribute to carbon sequestration capacity and biodiversity conservation,
- Create avenue for tree planting to increase the public's awareness on healthy and sustainable environment, and promote ecotourism,
- Collaborate private financing for tree planting.

**Implementation Strategy:** The "Pay and Plant" program will be implemented through the following steps:

**Site Selection and Planning:** Identify suitable locations for tree planting activities across Bhutan's diverse ecosystems, ensuring alignment with conservation goals and community priorities.

**Tourism Integration:** Integrate the tree planting experience seamlessly into existing ecotourism activities, creating a unique and memorable component of tourists' itineraries.

**Educational Sessions:** Conduct informative sessions for tourists on the importance of afforestation, climate change mitigation, and the ecological significance of Bhutan's flora and fauna.

**Community Involvement:** Collaborate with local communities to promote active participation and create a sense of ownership in the tree planting process.

**Monitoring:** Implement robust monitoring mechanisms to track the growth and survival of planted trees regularly.

## **Plant Species and Sapling**

The plantation of only native species will be encouraged throughout the planting program. GBCL will keep the desirable sapling species ready prior to plantation.

Depending on the plant species, various plantation sites will be identified at different Dzongkhags in collaboration with Department of Forest and Park Services, under the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources.

Lampelri Recreational Park has a unique attraction of rhododendrons. Of the total 46 species that grow in Bhutan, 40 species are found here. This includes the 29 species that grow naturally in the area and another 11 that have been planted in the park Garden. The plantation of Rhododendron species will be encouraged in the rhododendron garden within the Park and one should honor the plantation of Rhodo species.

### **Contribution to plant and plantation**

Growing and nurturing of saplings take at least a year to reach the desirable planting height outside the nursery. GBCL will raise quality seedlings in the nurseries specifically for this program. The plantation of tree sapling involves the preparation of a sizeable pit for each species to facilitate its growth. The pit digging and other necessary arrangements will be done before the actual plantation.

The planted sapling should be ensured it survives and establishes by itself. For this, the utmost care and protection have to be given. This includes weeding, clearing, watering, and protection from fire hazards etc. The maintenance of plantation is encouraged till the 5<sup>th</sup> year of plantation or until its establishment.

For honoring the privilege to plant special sapling species for the right purpose, an individual/group might contribute at least the cost of the sapling till it gets established and called a TREE – USD 25 for each sapling- onwards – sky is the limit.

### **Enjoy your plant's growth**

To make the pay and plant program more exciting and impactful, GBCL will record the geo-coordinates of each tree which will be shared with the individual who planted the sapling to monitor virtually and enjoy the growth of their plants.

### **Expected Outcomes**

- Increased number of trees planted, contributing to enhanced carbon sequestration capacity and biodiversity.
- Heightened awareness about the environmental and climate benefits of tree planting.

- Strengthened ecotourism program, by creating an avenue for environmentally committed people.
- Establishment of partnerships with private entities for sustainable financing of climate mitigation programs.
- Enhanced local community engagement and empowerment in conservation efforts.

## **Conclusion**

"Pay and Plant" embodies Bhutan's commitment to environmental sustainability, innovative conservation strategies, and responsible tourism. By offering an immersive and impactful experience to the planters, the program not only contributes to climate change mitigation and carbon sequestration but also creates a lasting legacy of ecological stewardship. As Bhutan continues to lead the way in sustainable development, "Pay and Plant" stands as a model for leveraging tourism to address pressing global challenges. As a certified agency to carry out all plantations in the country, GBCL will strive to fulfill all the objectives.