Systematic Observations Financing Facility

Fifteenth Steering Committee
21 October 2026

SOFF country engagement visit: Bhutan

6th – 12th September 2027

INF 15.6

Systematic Observations
Financing Facility



Weather and climate data for resilience

Purpose of this Document

This document provides the context and objectives of the proposed SOFF country engagement visit to Bhutan from 6th - 12th September 2027, coinciding with the launch of Bhutan's first-ever upper air station.

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SOFF country visit – Bhutan

Context

As of September 2026, the SOFF portfolio covers 66 countries with over USD 140 Million approved in support to countries. This includes 64 countries receiving support under the Readiness phase, of which 26 countries have progressed to the Investment phase with funding fully approved. Detailed information on portfolio and implementation progress is outlined in the INF Implementation Progress report.

Bhutan is among the countries making substantive progress under the leadership of the National Centre for Hydrology and Meteorology (NCHM, Bhutan). SOFF Investment funding of USD 4.6 million is being implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) - one of the three co-founders of SOFF and co-chair of SOFF Advisory Board- as the Implementing Entity and with the Finnish Meteorological Institute (FMI) as Peer Advisor.

Implementation is progressing across all components. Capacity development activities are underway, the GBON surface station upgrade was recently completed, and five additional stations installed through JICA support are being optimized with some of them already sharing data internationally.

A major milestone is expected in 2027 with the establishment of Bhutan's first-ever upper-air observing facility at Damphu, Tsirang. Beyond its national significance, observations from Bhutan's data-sparse, high-altitude Himalayan region will contribute to global weather prediction. Strengthened observations are also strategically important for Bhutan's national priorities as reflected in the video message from the Prime Minister of Bhutan, at the SOFF high-level event at COP 30 in Brazil, highlighting the importance of stronger weather and climate services for Bhutan's development and resilience.

The SOFF Investment Phase in Bhutan is also creating opportunities to leverage larger climate finance for early warning systems through its operational partners. In particular, UNEP's role as both SOFF Implementing Entity and a Green Climate Fund (GCF) accredited entity creates a direct pathway between SOFF Investments and broader climate finance. Building on the infrastructure and national capacity established under SOFF, a USD 26 million project is being developed by UNEP supported through the GCF Project Preparation Facility, to strengthen climate information and impact-based multi-hazard early warning systems nationwide. The project provides a concrete example of how SOFF investments in foundational observations enable and complement broader climate finance for national resilience.

Against this backdrop and following suggestions of some Steering Committee members of a country visit, a SOFF country engagement visit to Bhutan is planned from 6th to 12th September 2027, linked to the launch of the upper-air station. The visit would bring together SOFF Steering Committee members, key SOFF partners, and the Royal Government of Bhutan, to see the SOFF model in practice: from investment in

fundamental observations, to strengthened global weather prediction while enabling wider climate action at country level.

Purpose

1. Country engagement

- **Respond to an invitation from the Royal Government of Bhutan** to visit Bhutan for the launch of the country's first upper-air radiosonde facility.
- **Highlight the foundational value of GBON and systematic observations** particularly for agriculture, hydropower, aviation, disaster risk reduction including Bhutan's wider development priorities.
- **Showcase Bhutan's leadership in SOFF implementation** building on its role as host of the SOFF South Asia Regional Workshop (September 2024) while also highlighting Bhutan's contribution to a global public good through international data sharing from its complex mountain climate system, while reinforcing the country's global climate championship as the world's first carbon-negative country.
- **Mark the first-ever visit of a Steering Committee of global climate fund and of the WMO Secretary-General to Bhutan**, including engagement with youth and Bhutan's unique weather and climate cultural traditions.

2. Partner engagement

- **Engage key partners** including SOFF Steering Committee, climate funds, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), South Asia HydroMet Forum (SAHF) and others to identify opportunities for creating further synergies and complementarity with SOFF Investments in the country and across the SOFF portfolio.
- **Showcase SOFF–GCF complementarity.** Highlight Bhutan as an example of how targeted SOFF investments in foundational observing systems can be scaled up through substantially larger climate finance investments.
- **Examine how SOFF investments are delivered in practice**, through the arrangement between NCHM, UNEP and FMI that converts approved funding into installed, operating and internationally reporting infrastructure, and the lessons this offers for the wider SOFF portfolio.
- **Showcase the SOFF–ECMWF two-way value proposition** from the use of ECMWF forecast products for national forecasting and warnings, to Bhutan's contribution of observations that strengthen global weather prediction.

3. SOFF Advocacy and Communications

- **Capture Bhutan's case to generate SOFF advocacy and communications materials** on the full SOFF model combining country leadership, implementation progress, strong international community of practice linking local efforts to global

impacts as well a demonstration of climate finance collaboration between SOFF and GCF.

Draft Agenda

Date	Location	Activities
September 6-7 (Monday – Tuesday)	Flights to Paro→Thimphu	• Flights from Participants' departing cities to Paro • Arrival in Paro and transfer to Thimphu • Rest, informal dinner with the delegation + NCHM
September 8 (Wednesday)	Thimphu	*Morning:* • Courtesy Call with His Excellency the Prime Minister of Bhutan or Minister of Foreign Affairs jointly with the UN Country resident representative . • Visit to National Centre for Hydrology and Meteorology (NCHM) and courtesy call with MoENR Secretary (Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources), Director General (NCHM) and Division Chiefs. *Afternoon:* • Keynotes session and engagement with students at the Royal Thimphu College/Royal University of Bhutan and exchanges with traditional institutions engaged in weather and climate practices (Pangri Zampa Institute) • Working reception: presentation of SOFF, followed by partner engagement including light snacks and drinks *Overnight in Thimphu*
September 9 (Thursday)	Thimphu → Tsirang → Punakha	*Morning – early Afternoon:* • Travel to Tsirang (GBON location, approx. 5 hours) • Upper Air launch • GCF project launch/briefing as demonstration of SOFF upscaling to the other parts of the Early Warning System value chain *Afternoon:*

		• Travel to Punakha *Overnight in Punakha*
September 10 (Friday)	Punakha → Paro	*Morning:* • Visit Early Warning Station (GLOF monitoring) in Punakha and meeting with relevant stakeholders *Afternoon:* • Travel to Paro (approx. 3 hours) Overnight in Paro
September 11 (Saturday) – Optional	Paro	• One day cultural tour • Hike to Tigers Nest Monastery
September 12 (Sunday)	Paro → Departure	Departure

Participants

1. SOFF Steering Committee: all Steering Committee members invited to join
2. WMO Secretariat: Secretary-General potentially joined by one senior staff from WMO Technical Authority
3. Implementing Entity - United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP): Senior level representative, Portfolio Manager
4. Peer Advisor - Finnish Meteorological Institute (FMI): Senior level representative
5. Green Climate Fund (GCF): Senior level representative
6. Secretariats of the other climate funds with which SOFF signed collaboration agreement: Senior level representatives of Adaptation Fund, Climate Investment Funds, Global Environment Facility, Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems initiative
7. ECMWF: Senior level representative
8. World Bank as funding partner of the South Asia Hydromet Forum
9. Japan International Cooperation Agency
10. Korea International Cooperation Agency
11. National Centre for Hydrology and Meteorology (NCHM), Bhutan
12. Other national participants, Bhutan Red Cross Society, College of Natural Resources, Royal Thimphu College.
13. SOFF Secretariat: Director (current and incoming), Deputy Director, one communications staff, one operations staff (Bhutanese national)

Logistics

Participation is expected to be funded from participants' respective institutional budgets. Indicative costs for a round-trip flight from Europe and five nights accommodation correspond to CHF 4000 per participant.

Visa arrangements for official visits will be supported by NCHM and the Royal Government of Bhutan.

Further logistical details will be provided closer to the date of the visit.