

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR ABTO

Strengthening Tour Operator Associations in Bhutan and Costa Rica, a
Bilateral Project Implemented by Association of Bhutanese Tour Op-
erators and Ecole Experience under the Programme for South South
Cooperation.
2008-2010



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Introduction

ABTO is a membership organisation of tour operators. It was established in January 2000 to complement the Tourism Development Fund (TDF) which was created in 1999 and maintained by the then Department of Tourism. ABTO was conceptualised as a platform which represents private sector interests and gives a “collective voice” to tour operators. In various policy making forums that impact the tourism industry, ABTO negotiates, initiates and facilitates the development of value-added products and services in favour of its members.

ABTO renders services to some 300 plus registered members. The organisation is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of a President and nine other leading members of the tourism industry. The Board is served by a Secretariat which has grown from one to six fulltime staff. It is headed by a General Secretary. The Secretariat networks and liaises with all relevant Government entities and key stakeholders in the tourism industry to proactively contribute to the overall development of the sector.

ABTO’s role expands beyond the realm of only protecting needs and interests of its members, to helping them understand and stay abreast with the bigger picture of tourism and economic development in the country. ABTO networks and liaises to negotiate the space for its clientele of tour operators to collaborate with RGoB, particularly the Tourism Council of Bhutan.

Rationale for the Strategic Plan 2009-2012

The Organisation Assessment of ABTO conducted at the end of 2008 has recommended the formulation of a Strategic Plan for ABTO to cover a time period of 3-5 years. The Strategic Plan is a ‘road map’ that will guide ABTO into the future, incorporating outcomes of the organisational assessment to move forward in a planned manner.

Vision

A state of the art membership organisation that develops and promotes the Bhutanese tourism and travel industry with the highest standards of service, ethics and professionalism in line with the noble vision of Gross National Happiness.

Mission statement

To represent and promote the general interests of Bhutanese tour operators in the national, regional and international travel and tourism industry.

Values

- professionalism
- responsible tourism
- teamwork
- caring for each other and communities
- happy employees

Future direction

ABTO is determined to capitalise on its organisational experiences and strength of its membership to make a concerted leap forward during next three years. Based on deep internal reflection and consultations, the organisation has decided to sharpen its focus and strengthen itself in following three strategic areas:

- I. Positioning ABTO much more prominently as a recognised and independent membership organisation,
- II. Streamlining and strengthening core business areas to deliver quality and diverse range of services that its members value.
- III. Professionalising ABTO Secretariat for efficient and effective functioning.

OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES & TARGETS

✓ POSITIONING ABTO

The first two objectives will address the important strategic area of positioning the organisation more appropriately and prominently in the changing context of Bhutan's political scenario, rapid economic development and business environment.

Objective No.1

ABTO to become a recognised and independent membership organisation with clear mandate and roles,

Strategies

i. Clarifying and harmonising mandate and roles of ABTO via-a-vis Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB)

From the Organisation Assessment of ABTO the need for more clarity due to overlap of mandate or roles between the TCB and ABTO is obvious and has to be urgently sorted out to strengthen the sector as a whole. What is also very obvious is that the *mandate of policy-making, drafting laws, standard setting and roles to boost and regulate the tourism industry including supervision, monitoring and evaluation falls in the premises of the TCB-RGoB*. These roles help TCB to lead the tourism sector towards achieving the bigger national goals and targets. However *the mandate to conduct advocacy, liaison and facilitative roles towards the government on behalf of private sector falls in the premises of ABTO* as the Non-government membership organization representing the "collective voice" of tour operators. Additionally, ABTO is also in a favourable position to provide valuable inputs to TCB for identification of potential products and markets. To take it a step further once TCB has potential products and services, they could outsource to ABTO to develop in partnership with capable members of ABTO. Hence in order to facilitate a truly vibrant growth in the sector it is critical to capitalise on the strengths and favourable positions that each organisation enjoys and *build on the complimentarily that exists*. To do so, *regular coordination meetings between TCB and ABTO* are a must to demystify doubts, explore partnerships and close communications gaps that may exist at any given moment.

ii. Changes in mechanism of managing the Tourism Development Fund or TDF:

Proposed is a joint management between TCB and ABTO with a mechanism to rotate the Chairpersonship of TDF Management Committee.

TDF was conceived by RGOB for development of the tourism products and services and operators contributes \$10 per tourist per visit to the Fund. TCB manages the Fund with a level of participation by ABTO which leaves much to be

desired. From the Organisation Assessment of ABTO it is clear that its members want ABTO to play a more prominent role ie. a joint management role together with TCB, so that ABTO has more say than it currently does in the decision-making process pertaining to the use of the TDF. A slight increase in number of ABTO members on the Committee is required as TCB enjoys the majority right now in addition to holding the permanent position of Chairperson of the TDF Management Committee. Therefore a change in norm to rotate the Chairpersonship of the TDF Management Committee is highly desirable and ABTO has decided to work towards it. The existing norm of a permanent Chairperson from TCB will be changed and replaced by a mechanism to implement the rotation of the chairpersonship. This will give ABTO and its 'common voice' a fairer representation in the Committee. It will greatly improve participation, increase transparency in the decision-making process for utilisation of the fund, and accountability to operators/members who work hard and have contribute to the growth of the TDF.

Targets

By 2012:–

- 12 quarterly coordination meetings organised.
- Improved relations between TCB and ABTO whereby TCB is clearly in areas of overall policy making, setting standards and regulating the tourism sector whilst delegating and outsourcing task of product development to ABTO.
- ABTO GS has obtained right to Chairpersonship of TDF Management Committee and chaired it twice?
- ABTO has equal representation in the TDF Committee in terms of numbers, as TCB.

Objective No. 2

ABTO to switch status to become a full fledged MBO.

Strategies

- ABTO will register itself with the CSO Authority as a MBO and have its Articles of Association approved.

Since its inception till date, ABTO has been functioning as a name-sake NGO/CSO like all other similar organisations without a national NGO policy in place. Given its strong affiliation to TCB due to the source of funding which supports the functioning of the organisation, ABTO has been working very closely guided by TCB.

The Civil Society Organisations Act for Bhutan was passed by the National Assembly in June 2007. The interim CSO Authority has been set up at Ministry of

Home and Culture in late March 2009. This provides ABTO with the opportunity to register itself and gain a formal legal status to operate independently. The Articles of Association for ABTO has been drafted and ABTO will register itself as a MBO (Mutually Beneficial Organisation) as soon as registration process begins. Once formal registration procedure is complete, ABTO will work with vigour to clarify and strengthen its position within the national tourism industry. The hitherto grey areas, overlaps and duplication of mandate, roles and efforts vis-a-vis TCB will be overcome and a harmonious relationship built in the overall interest and commitment to develop and take the sector to new heights during the 10th FYP.

Targets

By 2012: ABTO will be a recognised and independent MBO with a clear-cut and harmonious relationship with TCB-RGoB in matters concerning the TDF.

Monitoring the first strategic area ie. Positioning ABTO:

Objectives	Strategies	Targets by 2012
1. ABTO to become a recognised and independent membership organisation with clear mandate and roles,	<i>i. to clarify and harmonise mandate and roles of ABTO vis-a-vis Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB)</i> <i>ii. to change mechanism of managing the Tourism Development Fund or TDF</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 12 quarterly coordination meetings organised. - Improved relations between TCB and ABTO whereby TCB is clearly in areas of overall policy making, setting standards and regulating the tourism sector whilst delegating and outsourcing task of product development to ABTO. - ABTO GS has obtained right to Chairpersonship of TDF Management Committee and chaired it twice? - ABTO has equal representation in the TDF Committee in terms of numbers, as TCB.
2. ABTO to switch status to become a full fledged MBO.	ABTO will register itself with the CSO Authority as a MBO and have its Articles of Association approved.	ABTO will be a recognised and independent MBO with a clear-cut and harmonious relationship with TCB-RGoB in matters concerning the TDF.

✓ **STREAMLINING AND STRENGTHENING CORE BUSINESS AREAS of ABTO**

In order to delivering quality and diverse range of services that its members value, ABTO has decided to streamline its work and strengthen the three core business areas or CBAs ie.

- i. Advocacy
- ii. Marketing
- iii. Capacity building (of member tour operators)

Therefore the next three objectives (3-5) will aim to translate the three CBAs into tangible outcomes for the organisation by way of products and services that are delivered.

Objective No.3

ABTO to act as an effective membership organisation that advocates, facilitates, liaises and negotiates in the interest of its members and the tourism sector.

Strategies

Undertake research and comparative studies to advocate strongly for its members vis-a-vis policy makers in the tourism industry so that ABTO's mandate and roles in the Bhutan's business and economic development are adequately acknowledged and supported.

Targets (products & services)

Policy briefs and consultations for advocacy

- Streamlining government procedures
- Improvement of visa processing system
- Strengthening network with Hotel Association and Guide Association

Objective No.4:

To have satisfied members whose business interests are represented and marketed appropriately both internally and externally.

Strategies

Proactively identify new markets, develop new products and services to continually diversify what's on offer and promote the business of its members aggressively, in Bhutan and abroad..

Targets or Products & Services

Publications and reports on markets, marketing and packages

- Japan
- United Kingdom
- China
- Germany
- Spain
- India

Objective No.5

To have highly value driven members functioning in a professional manner and adhering strictly to the ABTO Code of Conduct.

Strategies

- Have a focused Human Resources Development Plan to enhance capacity of Secretariat and members through relevant education and training.
- Promote a value driven professional clientele through promotion of and compliance to the ABTO Code of Conduct among ABTO members.

Targets or Products & services

By 2012 :

- Trainings and education, capacity building of tour operators and their supporting staff at least 15 training that includes both Short term, long term.
- Awareness raising on products and services at least 5 programme

Monitoring progress in 2nd strategic area ie. Streamlining and strengthening CBAs of ABTO:

Objectives	Strategies	Targets or Products & Services to achieve by 2012
3. ABTO to act as an effective membership organisation that advocates, facilitates, liaises and negotiates in the interest of its	- undertake research and comparative studies	Development of Policy briefs - Holding Consultations with government and key stakeholders.

members and the tourism sector. (Advocacy)		Policy, rules and regulations
4. To have satisfied members whose business interests are represented and marketed appropriately both internally and externally. (Marketing)	- undertake market research and identify new packages	-publications on new markets and packages, 10 numbers
5. To have highly value driven members functioning in a professional manner and adhering strictly to the ABTO Code of Conduct (Capacity building)	-to promote / implement ABTO code of conduct - To train and conduct awareness raising regularly in relevant areas and themes	- Code of Conduct well understood and practiced by all. - Training in business development skills, marketing and packaging, communication and safety

✓ PROFESSIONALISING ABTO SECRETARIAT

As part of the effort to professionalise the ABTO Secretariat for efficient and effective functioning, following elements of the organisation with regard to internal operations will be closely examined and re-oriented to strengthen ABTO's mission:

- Overall organisational structure of ABTO
- Human Resources Management and Development
- Administrative , Management and Financial sustainability
- Image building

Hence the next four objectives will address the above elements and come up with strategies to achieve them within the time frame of this Strategic Plan.

Objective No. 6

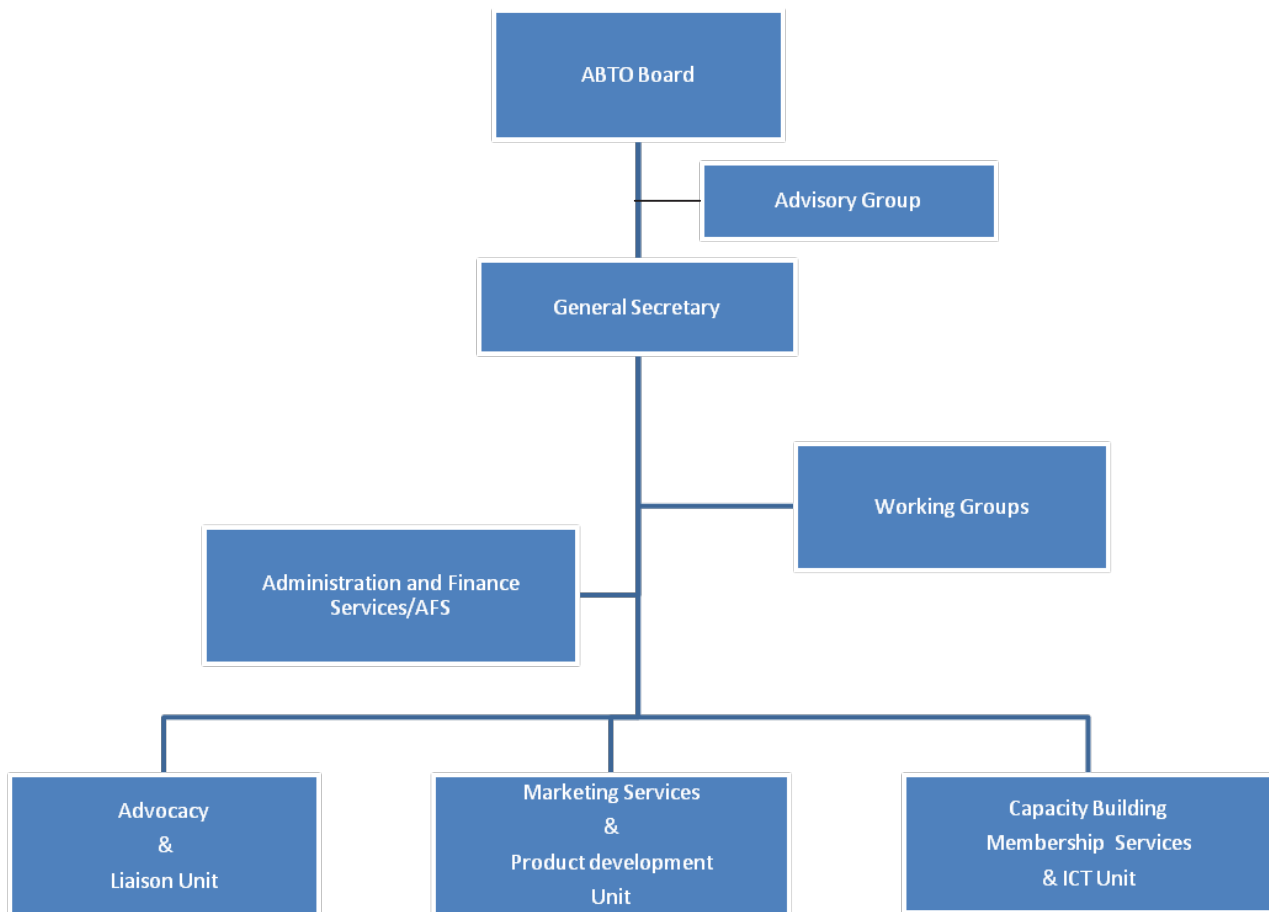
To have a revised organisational structure for effective and efficient functioning.

Strategies

ABTO will restructure and reorganise itself to achieve its mission more effectively in working towards professionalizing the organisation as a whole and its services to members,

The current structure has two Divisions or Units to distinguish the administration and finance management of the Secretariat from the Membership services to the client-members. The new structure will be aligned with the core business areas of ABTO.

New Organogram – next page :



- **The Board of ABTO**

Within the current Terms of Reference (nature, purposes and functioning) of the ABTO Board the Board will continue to consist of only Tour Operators. As the final decision-making body of ABTO, the Board serves to support the ABTO Secretariat to discuss and decide on pertinent internal issues that represent the wider interests of its members.

- **Advisory Group**

In the new structure, decision making by the Board will be further supported by a heterogeneous Advisory Group which is a ‘sum’ of the seven thematic Working Groups, to act as an extended Board. All stakeholders will be represented in the Advisory Group which will meet from time to time to resolve cross cutting issues. This group will meet before or after regular Board Meetings, as appropriate and necessary, to take care of the concern of wider representation to accommodate views of other stakeholders besides tour operators. Hence broadening or

widening membership to the actual Board of ABTO will not add more value. The Advisory Group will fill in the perceived gap.

- **Working Groups**

ABTO Secretariat will continue to work with the thematic Working Groups to address urgent and specific issues faced by Tour Operators. It provides the Board and general members with the opportunity to be closely involved in the day to day works of the Secretariat and keep in touch with broader issues in the sector. Working Groups report directly to the General Secretary and helps ease some workload and pressures. These are homogenous groups led by Board members with a minimum of three volunteer general members.

- **Programme Units**

According to the new structure the programme functions of ABTO Secretariat will be organised to align itself with the core CBAs as :

- Advocacy and Liaison Unit
- Marketing and Product development Unit
- Capacity Building, membership services and ICT Unit.

- **Administration, management and finance services:**

Administration, management and finance services are towards staff of the Secretariat and hence should not feature as a main arm of ABTO as ABTO exists for its members not staff. The thematic Working Groups led by Board members, primarily serve to support the General Secretary and the Secretariat to carry out certain functions more effectively, and meaningfully with involvement of the Board.

Targets / products & services

By 2012 :

- ABTO will be fully reorganised and functioning as per new organogram, with three programme units to match the three CBAs.
- Working Group and Advisory Group are formal organised entities with guidelines and meeting at fixed intervals and moments and not adhoc.

Objective No. 7

To strengthen human resource management and development to achieve professionalism and proactive work culture.

Strategies

- develop a 3-year comprehensive HRM and HRD capacity building plan

- introduce fair and transparent recruitment, promotion, incentives system
- provide short term and long term training and development opportunities to staff
- review and introduce competitive pay and benefits fro staff.
- Provide conducive work environment that fosters learning, growth and teamwork.

In order to support its new structure and the mission to professionalise the organisation, ABTO will develop a 3-year comprehensive HR capacity building plan to acquire the required HR numbers and capacities to fulfil its role and mandate more fully. In addition, to profiles and numbers, other aspects such as teamwork, performance management, remuneration, training and development are important elements that the organisation will work on for optimal utilisation of capacities.

Targets / products & services

By 2012:.

- ABTO to be fully staffed and three programme Units to have professionals, specialists and support staff who have full capacity to deliver high quality services proactively to its membership and stay abreast with the changes and trends in the environment.
- Number of short term and long term training provided to staff.
- Staff salary and benefits reviewed and revised as appropriate.

In addition to the General Secretary and the AFS Unit person who have a cross cutting role, the following table shows the required staffing profiles and numbers that ABTO's HR Plan will work towards :

Unit	Profile or Position title	Number in 2012
Advocacy and Liaison Unit	1. Liaison Officer	1
Marketing & Product development Unit	1. Marketing Officer	1
	2. Programme Officer	1
Capacity Building & Membership services Unit	1. ICT Officer	1
	2. Research Officer	1
Total		5

As part of the above presented profiles, ABTO staff will have following core competencies:

- analytical skills
- research skills
- ability to learn and grow professionally
- communication, advocacy , negotiation skills

Objective No. 8:

To strengthen administrative and management systems to become a credible MBO.

Strategies

- To put in place administrative norms, systems and processes that optimize service delivery to members.

Targets / products & services

- state of the art equipments that promote fast and efficient communication via internet/e-mail and facilitate on- line registration, regular and fast communication with members and partners.
- annual audits in line with CSO requirements is a regular feature.
- updated budgeting software instituted.
- ABTO's own standard formats for accounting and reporting that all projects follow.

Objective No. 9

Image building and sustainability.

Strategies

- relocating ABTO Office to a cultural heritage site

To strengthen the position and cultural identity of its members, the stakeholders have decided to re-locate ABTO Secretariat to an old heritage site by purchasing an old traditional building to serve two purposes. It will be more affordable and sustainable in the long run and it will enhance the image and identity of ABTO and its members through a display of strong connection and commitment to one of the GNH pillars relevant to the tourism industry ie. conservation and promotion of cultural values. ABTO can rent out spaces to members and relevant service centers and earn rental income. Hence, ABTO will search and identify such a property. By 2010 ABTO will be in new location.

- Explore ways for sustainability of ABTO :

ABTO Secretariat is fully funded by the TDF and receives membership fees which are nominal. Once formally registered and recognised as a MBO with a

non-governmental status ABTO must become more self sufficient. To become more financially sustainable, It will explore following options:

- to negotiate with TCB-RGoB for a fair and definite or fixed share (say 75%) of TDF as its core and predictable budget.
- to negotiate for contracts from TCB-RGOB to develop certain number of products and services that are planned in the 10th FYP
- to pilot charging members for certain services that the Secretariat can deliver efficiently.
- to proactively develop proposals and raise funds.
- To identify, purchase and move to old heritage site (old traditional house or other monument) which will reduce overhead costs in the long run and earn rental income from housing key services and offices of few members.

Targets / products & services

By 2012 :

- ABTO receives 75% of TDF annually from TCB-RGOB
- 2 number of contracts obtained from TCB to develop new products out of 10FYP targets of RGoB.
- increased membership fees by 300%
- amount of funds (10 percent of budget) raised by charging members for delivery of high quality services.
- ABTO in new location with enhance image and status.

Monitoring the third strategic area ie. Professionalising ABTO Secretariat:

Objectives	Strategies	Targets or P&S
6. To have a revised organisational structure for effective and efficient functioning.	ABTO will restructure and reorganise itself to achieve its mission more effectively	ABTO working as per new structure. WG & AG have to meet regularly.
7. To strengthen human resource management and development to achieve professionalism and proactive work culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - develop a 3-year comprehensive HRM and HRD capacity building plan - introduce fair and transparent recruitment, promotion, incentives system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All professionals in place. - Staff salary and benefits reviewed and revised as appropriate. - Number of short term and long term training provided

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide short term and long term training and development opportunities to staff - review and introduce competitive pay and benefits fro staff. - Provide conducive work environment that fosters learning, growth and teamwork. 	<p>to staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -
<p>8. To strengthen administrative and management systems to become a credible MBO.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To put in place administrative norms, systems and processes that optimize service delivery to members and project as credible MBO. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - state of the art equipments that promote fast and efficient communication via internet/e-mail and facilitate on- line registration, regular and fast communication with members and partners. - annual audits in line with CSO requirements is a regular feature. - updated budgeting software instituted. - ABTO's own standard formats for accounting and reporting that all projects follow.
<p>9. Image building and sustainability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - relocating ABTO Office to a cultural heritage site - explore ways for sustainability of ABTO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABTO in new location with enhance image and status. • ABTO receives 75% of TDF annually from TCB-RGOB • 10 number of

		<p>contracts obtained from TCB to develop new products out of 10FYP targets of RGoB.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• increased membership fees by 50 %• Amount of funds (10 percent of budget) raised by charging members for delivery of high quality services.
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MONITORING AND EVALUATION FOR IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Key indicators to measure progress in each strategic area	Target by 2012
- a fully independent and formally recognised MBO under CSO Authority	Yes
- ABTO chairs TDF Committee alternatively with TCB	yes
- ABTO has majority membership in TDF Committee	yes
- Number of members	900
- Percentage of overhead costs covered by membership fees	15%
- Percentage of overhead costs covered by income/profits generated in-house	10%
- Facilitated development of new products	5
- Advocated for and resolved tourism technical issues, business issues, leadership issues	5
- Capacity building of members	300
- Number of professional staff recruited	3-5
- Number of annual review meetings held	3
- Moved to new premises representing image of ABTO	Yes
- Leadership and business development programmes held	3 covering 150 members



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