

# MI-KHUNG

Media and Democracy in Bhutan | www.bhutanemd.org.bt | Volume 1, Issue 1, June 2011



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## Media Strengthens Bhutan's Budding Democracy



Kavi Chongkittavorn, Commentator/Op-Ed writer from Thailand talking about media, governance and society at the Bhutan Media Dialogue.

■ Kavi Chongkittavorn

Visitors to this Himalayan kingdom will immediately be struck by the vibrancy of the local media, and especially the proliferation of printed media. Currently, seven daily and weekly tabloid-size papers are vying for a relatively small market of around 50,000. The question often asked is whether Bhutan has far more newspapers than the country needs.

Bhutanese journalists do not think so. They view the wide-spread publication of newspapers as a healthy sign because the public is hungry for news and information. In a de-

mocracy, the media helps people to make their own decisions as it has access to information and reports on the government's performance.

In this area, journalists say they have an important role to play in modern Bhutan. The country has recently transformed itself from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy in the past five years. The election in 2008 quickly turned the kingdom into the world's newest democracy. However, much needs to be done to further consolidate this emerging democracy.

A recent dialogue session was organised by the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democ-

cracy, attended by representatives of the media along with academic and government officials, including Prime Minister Jigmi Y Thinley and a few Cabinet members, provided unique opportunities to share views and learn from each other.

During three hours of lively exchange, sensitive issues including editorial independence, auditing, advertising policy, media professionalism and media self-regulatory body were discussed. While these stakeholders meet one another on a day-to-day basis, they normally do not have time to discuss the multiple roles each individual has to play in ensuring that Bhutan's

democracy can be further imbedded. Such encounters and continued dialogues should be further encouraged and institutionalised.

The forum can serve as a confidence-boosting mechanism between the media practitioners and government officials and politicians. Most importantly, it permits all stakeholders, particularly politicians and media, to get acquainted with one another in a less confrontational setting.

During the session, Prime Minister Thinley was frank and candid. He reiterated his gov-

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## Media Nomads

*Media Literacy and Education: A Teacher's Perspective*

■ Sonam Palden

As a teacher I can't help but share the concerns our leaders have for the future of our small kingdom. While they realise that the importance of a wholesome education of our youth serves as a solid foundation to realise their enormous potential, there are now real concerns about whether that potential can be realised.

There has been much discussion and speculation over the last few years on the quality of education and the various reasons that could have contrib-

uted to the demise in quality. People have failed to come up with concrete or relevant evidence that could actually prove this decline, yet the subject attracted attention.

For awhile, everyone played the blame game. The Education Ministry blamed the teachers and questioned their abilities. The teachers complained about not having enough time and being overburdened with various tasks, while parents thought the methodologies used by the teachers

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## Media Nomads

*Media Literacy and Education: A Teacher's Perspective*

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were out dated.

Schools were asked to monitor the progress of both students and teachers. Curriculums were revisited, syllabuses were discussed, and designed to fit the needs of the modern society. Shakespearean plays were done away with, new texts brought in. Teachers were trained in new techniques of classroom teaching giving more focus on the child-friendly environment theory.

But what went completely unnoticed was the invasion of technology. No one questioned that the bombardment of both the media and the digital revolution could well be one of reasons that contributed to lowering the quality of our education. The distractions created by the digital devices in our lives had gone unchecked. What's more, we knew precious little about the effects they could have on our children.

We have welcomed these new changes into our homes just so that we could move with the rest of the world, knowing very little or nothing at all about the affects it could have on our lives, on our children and society. We thought technology was invented for the good of the mankind, that is a solution to all our problems. But machines can only do so much. It is humans that need to be wise in their using them. Remember the nuclear energy was actually harvested for the good of mankind. It was also human beings who invented the nuclear weapons that have struck fear in the hearts of other humans.

Similarly, media was introduced so that we could be citizens who can make informed and wise decisions. But the question remains: Are we using it for the wholesome development of Bhutan?

I would like to share a few observations I have made in my own family dynamics, the schools and the communities that have I served. This is only one person's perception.

The types of media that are popular in Bhutan are the TV, cell phones, FM radio and the internet. I notice that youth in schools have become very aggressive and defensive, so teachers now find it difficult to enforce discipline. Teachers are challenged because students believe it is their right to question, regardless of the importance of issues. Youth are now demanding far more freedom in terms of self-expression as a part of their right according to democracy, but they show very little understanding of the responsibilities that each must fulfill to exercise that right.

Children mature very quickly because they are trying to become someone they have seen online or on visual media. The dance moves and clothes they wear have become very seductive. They engage in illicit relationships because they are glorified and romanticised

on films and music clips. They have started spending more time online than on their home work, thus affecting their performance in schools.

In many ways, they have lost the ability to entertain themselves. They have become very dependent on the media to provide them with instant gratification and entertainment. They have lost the ability to discover and explore. They have lost the ability to concentrate on one task. Youth suffer from an identity crisis as many of them idolise fictitious personalities. Many are not happy with how they look and feel inside, and what they have become in the process of trying to become their "idol". I feel it is time to say, "That's it. Enough!"

As Bhutanese, and as "safe-guarders" of the "future" we must ask ourselves how long will we take the back seat and pretend not to notice. How long? Developed countries waited till their youth started dying of starvation in the cyber cafes trying to set a new gaming world record or trying to break one. They waited till their 17

year-olds decided to play 'Rambo' in school that claimed many innocent lives. This could have been averted if only they had paid attention.

Are we going to wait till the situation in our own society reaches such extremes or are we going to collectively say: 'No! We will take action. Our future is too precious, and more importantly, because we may not get a second chance at this.' We haven't got a single moment to lose. We must act. And act we will. We must create awareness. We must aspire to be the pioneers of media literacy and education in Bhutan. We must use our late entrance into the digital age to our advantage.

Programmes such as Media Nomads (media literacy) are little sparks of hope. This spark must be nurtured. Just as we have finally become aware of the affects of media consumption, we should work towards awakening the whole nation in the process. As we are empowered with knowledge today, lets help our youth to use their own knowledge for better use.



Students de-constructing an advertisement.

## Potential Role of Think Tanks in Bhutan's Governance

■ Lhawang Ugyel

An essential ingredient for a vibrant democracy is to have a wider network of stakeholders participating in the decision-making trajectory at all stages. The process starts from determining the right policies and programmes till its evaluation upon implementation. In an ideal democratic system, the public through a deliberative setting will choose the policies that suit their needs the best, and will ensure through the electoral process that a government is elected which will deliver the goods. In the midst of the policy process, systems of checks and balances such as the judiciary, legislature and other regulatory authorities have been put into place to guarantee that governments in power do not abuse their position.

These systems of check and balances, however, are not designed to ascertain that the right policies are always implemented. Governments can, and often do, get carried away in implementing policies based on the falsified assumption that it knows what is best for the public. The public can use its prerogative to penalise the government by denying them their votes in the next round of elections. But by then it is too late, for the public as well as the government, since the wrong policies have already been implemented. Therefore for the government to continually implement the policies that are desirable, objective reviews of the policies have to be made at all stages of the policy process. In addition to the role of the public and the government in the decision-making process, this is where the other key stakeholders—think tanks

(under the aegis of civil society organisations) and media—in democracy play a crucial role.

It is the role of the think tanks and the media to act as the nation's conscience and critically review the government's actions and inform the public accordingly. Minus a fledgling media industry that is seeking to establish its role in the public policy arena amidst its own set of problems (for example, financial woes, newsworthiness, management issues), there is a dearth of other formal channels of expressing critical reviews of the government's policy in Bhutan. To fill in this void, there is an imminent need for credible and independent think tanks to be established in the country.

Think tanks play a crucial role in the overall governance of the country by taking on some of the following roles and responsibilities. First, they serve as an informed and independent voice in policy debates through the identification of current domestic and related-international policy issues. Secondly, they provide a platform for discourse to take place that will generate various policy-options for the government to consider and also inform the public through means of information dissemination.

There are some caveats that think tanks have to be mindful of, and funding is always an important issue to consider. A think tank must maintain a group of committed and professional staff, and undertaking research work can be quite expensive. Even when financial resources have been secured, the think tanks will have to be able to identify conflict of interests between the research findings and the source of funds for the research. This issue of vested in-

terests is important to note, and many think tanks around the world have been severely criticised for aligning their research interests too closely with their main funding source.

Perhaps one of the first semblances of an effective think tank in the country was the formation of the People's Projects Research Office (PPRO) and its various sub-committees that were informally set up in 2006. With a floating population of researchers pulled out from the civil service, corporate and the private sector for brief periods; the PPRO encouraged its researchers to 'think-out-of-the-box' and come up with strategies that would fast-track the country's development process. Although the findings of the PPRO were never formalised, some of the policies and programs in the 10th Five-Year Plan are a result of the ideas

generated by the PPRO and its sub-committees.

As the country treads the path of democracy, Bhutan has reached a point of its economic and social development where the situation now warrants independent think tanks. The experience of the PPRO is an indication that with the right guidance and motivation, there is a public space available to make use of qualified and capable people in the country. Also the right legislative and policy environment has already been facilitated through the passing of the Civil Society Organisation Act in 2007. Now all we need to put into place are think tanks that seek the betterment of the country through its capability of bringing to the forefront issues and concepts of national importance and providing critical and beneficial analysis.



Welcome to the first edition of Mi-khung. Mi-khung which means "Citizen" in Dzongkha is Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy's bi-annual newsletter.

The 8-paged newsletter will have stories and articles about media and democracy in Bhutan. The newsletter is a platform for Bhutanese to share their views and opinions on how to build a strong foundation for a vibrant democracy. The newsletter also shares news on BCMD and our activities.

BCMD welcomes articles submitted by readers. Most articles run about 500 words. We welcome submissions that are relevant to BCMD's mission of contributing to the development of a culture of democracy. Please send your contribution to [bcmdbt@gmail.com](mailto:bcmdbt@gmail.com). For more information call 327903. Follow us on facebook: Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy or [www.bhutancommand.org.bt](http://www.bhutancommand.org.bt).

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# What's Up?

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## Youth and Media Literacy

Inspired by GNH in Education workshop (December 2009) Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) and St. Michael's College, Vermont, USA conducted its first ever Media Nomads workshop. The workshop started from January 3, 2011 with 21 youth from various schools and colleges.

Media Nomads is a programme of media literacy workshops followed by sessions on synthesising lessons learned and the co-production of films on media literacy. See [www.bhutancmd.org.bt](http://www.bhutancmd.org.bt) for the film clips produced.

During the workshop Media Nomads maintained a journal where they wrote about their experiences with media and the amount of time they spent on TV, radio and internet. Here are some of the excerpts taken from the Media Nomads' journals.

"Media can result in poorer academic grades; when my lecturer is teaching, I find myself busy texting under the table, this act diverts my concentration and I find myself lost. There is no day when I do not use phone for less than an hour which isolates me from my friends and I miss most of the fun activities that we carry out in the hostel. Thus, slowly media is dragging me in the dark ocean of despair."

*Indira Khatiwara, 21, Sherubtse College*

"We are what we have. This is slowly becoming the case in Bhutan, especially with the youth. Every youth owns a cell phone, a TV set at home and most certainly a Facebook account. When they do not have these liberties they are found "not cool" or "uncool" by their peers. Making their gadgets their new best friends and consequently spending less time with their families and actual friends. Will Facebook be hugging us or comforting us when we are sad or afraid?"

*Kesang Om, 19, Sherubtse College*

"Media is a necessary evil, as everything has two sides. Media too has its positive and negative impacts. Media can help people to communicate, get information and keep our self updated but media can cause violence, addiction, health problems and take us away into an unreal world. Remember to first look, think and analyse before using media."

*Gyelwa Kuenzom, 15, Lungtenzampa Middle Secondary School*

"Media is a source of information, it can act as a link between the government and its people. Media also has negative impact which is a threat to our culture and tradition if we don't know how to filter the information that we are exposed to."

*Ngawang Dorji, 22, Punakha Higher Secondary School*

"Media controls the minds of the people but media's power is frail without the people's support, it can be shut off with the ease of turning a light switch. So the power lies with the media consumers to consume effectively and to one's benefit."

*Sonam Yangchen Lhamo, 17, Punakha Higher Secondary School*

"When I heard about this workshop I was reluctant to attend at first but a gradual interest grew. The discussions and documents presented by our friends from St. Michael's College, USA and their awareness and predictions verified the adverse affects of media. I myself have been victimised by the adversity of media at some point but it wasn't serious enough to be termed as an addiction. I consumed Facebook for more than 3-4hrs a day. My cell phone balance won't even last a month. But I think it all changed for me after the workshop."

*Rajesh Ghalley, 17, Motithang Higher Secondary School*

"Do you think only alcohol and drugs are addictive? Well think again, media is just as addictive and destructive! It is becoming a public health concern."

*Kinley Wangmo, 23, Institute of Language and Cultural Studies*

"Though our media nomad seeds are few we will sow it as far as possible and multiply our seeds so that we can reap the fruits of democracy forever."

*Phuntsho Choden, 21, Institute of Language and Cultural Studies*

BCMD wishes to acknowledge and thank the following partners and supporters:





15 youth learn to use film to tell stories of change during BCMD's third documentary film workshop from July 5-13, 2010. The workshop resulted in the production of five films with pro-social themes like poverty, climate change, and life of immigrant workers in Bhutan.



Sheila Coronel, Director of the Stable Centre for Investigative Journalism, Columbia University (Standing left) and Reginald Chua editor-in-chief of the South China Morning Post (right) training journalists in Bhutan.

Bhutan's rapidly expanding media had the opportunity to learn how to provide more analytical, original and rigorous reporting from some of the news industry's best practitioners. Sixteen journalists from print and broadcast agencies spent four days (August 30 – September 2, 2010) learning about accountability journalism and how to use figures to give depth to stories. Resource persons from Columbia University and the South China Morning Post emphasized the need for media in a democracy to serve the public interests.

This is one of the first such workshops to focus on investigative reporting since Bhutan became a democracy in 2008. There are today seven newspapers and six radio stations in Bhutan, serving a nation of 675,000 people. Media in Bhutan have a tendency to be entertainment oriented although the print media are striving hard to provide the news and information required in a rapidly changing society.



Students attending monthly documentary film screening explain their understanding of democracy by completing the caption "Democracy is..."

On World Democracy Day, September 15th, 2010 youth were invited to complete the caption "Democracy is..." on the white canvas (shown above) during BCMD's monthly documentary film screening.



BCMD conducted a forum on journalism and democracy in a changing media landscape (August 4, 2010).

The forum in Thimphu hosted more than 50 participants from the media, civil society organisations and government ministries. The Director of the Knight Fellowship at Stanford University, Jim Bettinger, traced the evolving functions of journalism from the establishment of the newspaper to the rise of the internet and what implications these have for democracy. A key question he raised was what we, in Bhutan, are doing to ensure that journalism is being taken seriously?



Ana Carolina Mejia, a broadcast journalist from the US talking with the youth on the importance of documentaries as the medium of creatively disseminating pro-social messages.

To follow up on the summer documentary film workshop, BCMD holds monthly documentary screening for youth to prompt them to look beyond entertainment media and to help them appreciate how documentary films can be a tool to creatively express social, political, and youth concerns.

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# Focus on Media

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## Media as the Fourth Estate

■ Siok Sian Pek-Dorji

Drawing from experiences around the world Bhutan can develop a uniquely Bhutanese media that will contribute to the development of a democratic culture and promote the values of Gross National Happiness. This was one of the conclusions of the first Bhutan Media Dialogue hosted by the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy where more than 50 journalists and a cross-section of Bhutanese society got together to reflect on the role of media in Bhutan, Dialogue.

Two Asian journalist/scholars began the dialogue with presentations on media, governance and society. It prompted lively discussions among the participants on what it means to be a journalist in Bhutan and what role journalism should play in our changing society. The media were particularly self-introspective and open.

The two speakers also made presentations on Media as the 4<sup>th</sup> Estate to representatives of the government, including the prime minister, constitutional agencies, private sec-

tor and civil society. The large group shared their views on the media and their expectations from journalism in Bhutan.

In reflecting on what Bhutanese media should be like, one conclusion was evident - that every member of society has a stake in creating a healthy media culture in Bhutan, a culture that will contribute to the society that Bhutanese aspires to build.

Prime Minister Lyonchhoen Jigmi Y. Thinley said that Bhutan's media should consider itself the fourth branch of governance. "We commit ourselves to ensuring that just as we respect independence of the judiciary, we will respect independence and autonomy of the media," said the Prime Minister. He pointed out that media's main role is public service just like the other three branches of governance - the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. The Prime Minister referred to a shared responsibility in creating a vibrant democracy in Bhutan and emphasised that media must uphold the same levels of transparency and accountability as the other three branches of governance. Referring to media

as the most powerful public social entity that shapes opinion, shares ideas and knowledge, the Prime Minister said that media can raise standards for itself and that Bhutan has the opportunity to set and raise standards for media accountability.

Free and open exchange continued as participants responded to presentations on what Media as the 4<sup>th</sup> estate means, acknowledging the inherent tensions between government and media. Both journalists and the other participants present acknowledged that media are answerable to the public.

Cherian George, professor of journalism in Singapore, noted that Bhutan's media which has taken on the model of a free and responsible press is an experiment that could have far reaching implications for many in the region. The dominant model for press freedom lies at extreme ends where the press is either free without being responsible, or responsible with very little freedom. The government of Bhutan's commitment to a free and responsible media is a notable example.

"Bhutan is a work in prog-

ress and media is at a very exciting stage of development," said Kavi Chongkittavorn, a writer and commentator from Thailand who emphasised that journalists need to engage with government and civil society to become more professional.

Participants discussed four core questions during the dialogue.

1. What is the social responsibility of the media?
2. To whom should media be responsible? Who should media serve?
3. How should media give people voice? How and what should be done?
4. What should GNH Media be like?

The dialogue adopted several recommendations including the need to step up credibility through greater professionalism, improve accountability by making public their code of ethics and ownership. Details are available online at [www.bhutancmd.org.bt](http://www.bhutancmd.org.bt) Support for the Dialogue came from UNDEF and the Open Society Foundation.

## Media Strengthens Bhutan's Budding Democracy

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ernment's respect for freedom of the media and its independence to carry out journalistic duties. In a young democracy like Bhutan, he believed that the media can help to educate the public on important policy issues affecting their livelihood and the nation as a whole. He urged journalists to improve their

professionalism and accountability, which he believed were the most important qualifications.

Although the Bhutanese government is the media's biggest source of advertisements, the prime minister reaffirmed there would be no tampering with media freedom or any effort to link the advertising allocation with any favouritism in

government reporting.

It is interesting to note that at the beginning of the dialogue, there was a sense of unease and skepticism among the journalists. It was their first encounter with the prime minister in such a casual setting. However, frank exchanges of views, albeit with some disagreements, have sown seeds of mutual trust.

I also sensed an increasing mood of optimism among media friends that they can work together, without any erosion of their professionalism and integrity, and hold joint responsibilities to push forward Bhutan's democracy, along with the national agenda of Gross National Happiness.

## Upcoming Forums and Workshops

### Media Nomads 2- A Summer Camp for Youth

**Date:** Summer, 2011

**Focus:** The programme is designed to strengthen youth's abilities to think for themselves, communicate effectively using media, and use their powerful voices to contribute to the quality of life in their families, their communities. Will also focus on building the foundations for media literacy, enabling the youth to more critically evaluate the media they use consume on a day to day basis.

**For whom:** Youth in Bhutan

### Summer Camp for Leadership, Media, Arts and Hope- Loselling Middle Secondary School in collaboration with BCMD

**Date:** July 1-15, 2011

**Focus:** To engage children and motivate them to challenge themselves to explore and engage in new exciting fields of study that would inspire them to open their minds for extracurricular activities.

During these 13 days of camp, participants would be exposed to various activities like dharma and theatre, art and craft, dharma teachings, creative writing and story-telling, valuable life skills,

music and sports and media literacy.

**For whom:** Children of Changjiji colony & children with special problems.

### Annual Non-fiction Writing Workshop

**Date:** July, 2011

**Focus:** To introduce the elements of creative non-fiction writing as a genre in Bhutan and to provide a platform for the writers to exchange their ideas.

**For whom:** Writers, aspiring writers, and anyone who has a passion for writing.

### World Democracy Day 2011 – Photo Exhibition and Film Screening

**Date:** September 15, 2011

**Focus:** BCMD celebrates World Democracy Day to deepen the understanding of democracy among Bhutanese people. Last year we invited youth to send us their understanding of democracy in the form of a caption and a picture which we later compiled into a calendar for schools and institutions.

**For Whom:** Citizens and youth of Bhutan.

## Completed Activities

### Training workshop on Radio News Production Workshop

**Dates:** March 21-25 & March 28-April 1, 2011

**Focus:** The workshop trained radio journalists, producers and jockeys in news writing so that they can provide better news reporting on radio.

**Participations;** 26 (14 males & 12 females)

**Results/ Impact:** Participants learnt the basics of radio journalism, news writing and packaging of news stories.

More than 50% of the participants rated the workshop as excellent and requested more of these kinds of workshops in the future.

### Conference on Social Media and Democracy

**Date:** March 29-30, 2011

**Focus:** The workshop introduced social media, its challenges and opportunities to contribute to an understanding of how to use social media to promote democratic discussion.

**Participation:** 51 (22 females & 29 males)

**Results/ Impact:** The conference strengthened the understanding of social media and its importance and how it has an impact on our new democracy. It provided an opportunity for a cross section of society to come together to discuss social media use in Bhutan and to learn on all forms of social media like blogging and facebook.

### Story- telling through Films with Khyentse Norbu

**Date:** January 29, 2011

**Focus:** The one day symposium aimed to initiate a dialogue on telling Bhutanese stories and to explore the role and importance of film making and visual story telling. It was also to promote Bhutanese stories and elements in local films.

**Participation:** 35 including script writers, directors and producers from Bhutan's film fraternity.

**Results/ Impact:** Participants were able to share story ideas and many found it as an opportunity to seek clarity on film-making and how to instill greater professionalism in the growing film industry.

### Bhutan Media Dialogue

**Date:** December 20 – 21, 2010

**Focus:** The two day dialogue intended to bring together a cross-section of society for a discourse by exchanging ideas to develop media in Bhutan and to understand the concept of Media as the 4th Estate in a Bhutanese perspective.

**Participation:** 53 (34 males and 19 females). Participants included media professionals, government officials, and members of civil societies, constitutional agencies and private sector.

**Results/Impact:** As a first ever dialogue on media the event highlighted the importance of media in Bhutan. It established the understanding of media as the fourth estate or fourth branch of governance to mean independent, accountable media that serves the people of Bhutan. The dialogue further resulted in the drafting of recommendations to maximise the credibility and impact of journalism in Bhutan.

To know more about BCMD's activities and events, join us on facebook or log on to [www.bhutancommand.org.bt](http://www.bhutancommand.org.bt)

# 8

# Citizen's Guide

## What does it mean to be a citizen?



*"To be a citizen, it is not just thinking about and demanding fundamental rights, but shouldering more fundamental duties of a citizen. As a teacher, it means educating future citizens more responsibly and guiding them to become good and productive citizens. Every citizen is bestowed with the honour of the nationality, thus we must value the honour."*

**Sonam Tshewang, Teacher**



*"To be a citizen means to have the right or privileges a country has to offer. It also means that we are bound by the rules and regulations of the country and should abide by it. Being a Bhutanese citizen is a matter of great pride because we live in a country which is peaceful and harmonious."*

**Tenzin Choden, Student**



*"A citizen is someone who takes responsibility for the people and the country with integrity, patriotism and obedience. He/She would understand all the fundamental rights of good citizens. He will never regret to be born as a Bhutanese even in difficult times and will never forget his parents, teachers, country and the King for being kind and helpful to the needy."*

**Phuntsho Rinzin, Student**



*"Respecting each other, sharing responsibilities and behaving in a manner worthy of respect is our obligation as citizens."*

**Sonam Choden Retty, Miss Bhutan (2010)**



*"It is a proud feeling to be a citizen of Bhutan considering our tradition and culture, and our history."*

**Rinzin Dorji, Paro, Sharpa, Chukha Gangju**



*"To be a citizen is to be responsible not just for yourself but for your country as well."*

**Shelo, Housewife**

## ACTIVE CITIZENS

With a new democracy taking shape in Bhutan, we have the power to change or keep the course of our country. Our participation in every process is the key to move forward. Here we share 5 ways to be an active democratic citizen.

