

MI-KHUNG

Media and Democracy in Bhutan

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| Volume 2, Issue 1, May 2012

Pg. 3

Perspectives: Is it Journalism if its not ethical?



Pg. 5

Media Society Outreach to Eastern Schools

Pg. 12

What does it mean to be a citizen?



Understanding a “Culture of Democracy” through Ants



A half-day forum held at Tarayana to examine the idea of a “Culture of Democracy” and what it means to Bhutan.

■ Prof. Mark Mancall

To better understand the idea of a “Culture of Democracy”, I would like to begin by illustrating an analogy. (Let me stress that this is an analogy only, intended to simplify an incredibly complex subject.) Let us imagine a society of ants that has behaved, for as long as any observer can imagine, according to a structure of instincts that determines their behaviour as individuals in their community year after year. They go out on expeditions to find nutritional resources, collect food, distribute it, and perhaps sometimes fight other communities of ants depending on circumstances. Internally they are ruled by a very clear hierarchy determined by the size and the gender of the ants. They have duties, routines, and even social classes. It is all instinctive, however, unselfconscious, almost genetically determined, it seems.

Now let us further imagine that one day, for reasons we do not know, one of the ants begins to be conscious of everything that I have described and through the acquisition of that consciousness realises that her actions do not need to be dictated by the instinctive structures that have governed her society since time immemorial. She begins to wonder whether there would not be advantages to changing the instinctive structures and behaviours. Until this point, the instinctive behavioural structures have optimised the traditional interests of the ant community. But now, with her newly acquired consciousness, our ant begins to ask herself whether there are not other choices of structures to guide the behaviour of the ants that might optimise other interests of the ants, interests that the other ants have not yet themselves been able to imagine.

>> Continue pg. 7

Strengthening understanding of democracy in schools through news literacy

BCMD and Stony Brook University’s Center for News Literacy Signs Three-Year project to Develop News Literacy Classes For Bhutan’s schools

■ BCMD Staff Reporters

Thimphu, Bhutan – April, 2012 –Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) and Stony Brook University’s School of Journalism announced in April that it has begun work on a three-year programme to develop school lessons to help Bhutanese youth make sense of the free press and the role of citizenship in our new democracy.

Together with BCMD, Stony brook News literacy director Dean Miller and high school teacher, Michael Spikes, conducted a curriculum development workshop to create lesson plans revolving around media sources, citizenship, and debate and dialogue. BCMD has been piloting lessons on these priority issues in several

schools and colleges. The lesson plans will be used in media clubs as activities to generate critical thinking.

About a dozen teachers attended the workshop from April 2 – 6. The workshops were the first of a series envisioned as part of BCMD’s media literacy programme to promote media and democracy in Bhutan.

BCMD is contextualising all the lesson plans to make them relevant to Bhutan’s own environment. At an all-day workshop on April 7, another group of teachers wrote specific strategies for developing student publications and broadcasts at media clubs.

BCMD is focused on training teachers and students to be savvy media consumers and to

>> Continue pg. 7

A Lesson in “Active Citizenship”

■ Gayatri Bhandari

A pothole in the road recently taught me an important lesson in Active Citizenship.

I had long seen this pothole and watched the drivers plying back and forth over it. Sometimes my friends and

I watched and enjoyed the expressions on the faces of the people driving by in their luxury cars. I saw their sharp intake of breath, their eyes and lips squeezed together in intense anxiety as the under-

>> Continue pg. 6

What does an “Open Society” mean for Bhutan?

■ Sangay Khandu

When we talk of an “Open Society” we are talking about a culture of democracy where civic engagement and transparency are imbedded in the institutions.

An open society is one where civil liberties are respected and everyone is accountable.

This begs the following questions:

Can we have democracy without an open society?

Are we an open society?

To arrive at a relatively close answer we must first understand how closely knit Bhutanese society is.

This closeness of our society is seen in the traditional forms of civic engagement and community participation, which can be defined as the sense of personal responsibility individuals feel to uphold their obligations as part of any community. This can range from individual volunteerism to organisational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, working with others in a community to solve problems and interact with the social institutions.

Our traditional communities inherently took care of their own, bearing out the evidence of a deep-rooted culture of working together. This culture of cooperation was apparent in the way we built our homes, cultivated our farms and supported our friends and neighbours in times of illness and in death.

The closeness of our society, however, leaves us with a mixed legacy.

“Open Society” and the Infamous Bhutanese Grapevine

Every Bhutanese knows that we have a culture of getting our news through the

local grapevine with everyone claiming or purporting to know nearly everything about everyone.

If you take the typical gossip route of the Bhutanese grapevine to be a legitimate source of current news, then we can assume that we have a very open society where its citizens miss very few things. For better or worse, gossip is an inseparable part of our culture and we find ourselves indulging in it, entertaining it and, more importantly, becoming increasingly trusting of it. In this world, almost nothing is hidden and our society is all too open. In fact, how many of us Bhutanese gathered here today have at one time or another been part of this informal grapevine? We participate in this type of unsubstantiated national conversation in our homes, workplaces, bars and post-meeting discussions.

Take, for instance, the all-too-familiar rumours making the rounds before the actual promotion of a significant someone is made official. Sometimes we have the hearsay on the details of the politics behind such and such a promotion. In fact, this is usually the most tantalising part of the discussion where angles like blood ties and family relations are considered for their possible influence on the promotion in question.

With the arrival of the Internet such conversations have now spilled over into cyber space. Internet forums have become an active platform for these conversations. While conventional rumours limited the number of people in a conversation to the length and breadth of a room, the Internet allows relative anonymity and the participation of the much larger online community in our national conversations.

Open Society: Traditional

Platforms Vs. New Media

While Bhutanese people can be quite open in our gossip, we are generally not as open with our views and opinions in the more concrete real-world traditional platforms. In real-life forums and in print and on TV media we have not been very successful in generating serious discussion on the important issues that need such openness.

As such, the Civil Service Act is often blamed for not allowing our civil servants to contribute openly in such discussions. The general population, however, is not limited by any prohibitive laws from speaking out openly. The Constitution, in fact, guarantees this right. Does this mean that we not aware of our duties and rights as members of a democratic society? Have we not progressed in understanding democracy further than casting our votes during the periodic elections?

While the elected government and other state functionaries continue governing, it is critical that they continue to be in dialogue with our citizens. By encouraging alternative viewpoints we empower the people and enable this vibrant exchange to happen.

In the final analysis I sense that an amalgamation of our gossip style conversation flowing out and integrating around mainstream media and social media could be seen as contributing toward a fuller, more open society.

Today, Bhutanese people are slowly beginning to share their thoughts on social media platforms, mostly without anonymity. The comments on shared media could be used to generate discussion on important national issues. The fast growth of new media provides an outlet for many people who conventionally would not feel

comfortable openly discussing their views.

Some of you may be aware from news reports that a draft Right to Information (RTI) legislation has been submitted to the National Council for deliberation in the Ninth Session of the National Assembly. This is a very important bill as information allows citizens, CSOs and the media to build a good case for civic engagement and communication with the authorities in order to effect progressive change.

An open society is key in allowing citizens to participate in their own governance. It allows them to discuss and engage in alternative viewpoints. Citizens give up their absolute freedom to an elected government that promises safety and security (multi dimensional) by imposing duties on its citizens that include the paying of taxes, conforming with licenses application procedures and refraining from engaging in criminal activities, among others.

In exchange for these duties that limit our complete freedom, citizens are given rights under the constitution.

Our constitution guarantees Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Thought and Freedom of Speech. And it is in this spirit of openness that the governing and the governed must converse at all times. It is incumbent upon those who govern to allow for such an atmosphere of openness.

Allowing an “Open Society” to flower, and engaging in it is, in the end, the essence and corner stone of a healthy democracy.

Sangay Khandu is a Member of the National Council of Bhutan.

This is an excerpt from his presentation to a forum on “Can we have democracy without an open society?”

Is it Journalism if it's not ethical?

■ Siok Sian Pek Dorji

Journalism is going through a transition. Everywhere in the world, the conventional news media are struggling to survive as the digital world (e.g. Google or yahoo news) provide an overwhelming volume of aggregated news that pay nothing to media that create the content. In a world where technology is permitting infinite amounts of information to reach everyone, the business model for journalism is being transformed.

Another global trend is that newspapers have evolved from family run or small businesses into global conglomerates, a model that is making its way into Asia. This media model shows that news organisations are increasingly measuring success in terms of financial returns. News is being overtaken by advertising.

Here in Bhutan, too, journalism is struggling to find a business model. Sustainability of the news media is an issue in a country where a population of 700,000 have a choice of eleven newspapers, an increasing number of radio stations and a national television station that is about to lose its monopoly.

However, the issue is not just the survival of media companies. The overriding question at a media and ethics forum organised by the U.S. Centre for Media Ethics in April in Thimphu was: Is it possible for media to be both profitable and ethical? And, is being ethical good for business?

The answer is, and must be, "yes".

Lets begin by distinguishing between entertainment media and the news media. Entertainment media does just that – entertains. News media – newspapers, TV and radio – provide verified information necessary to inform citizens

and enable them to make decisions on issues affecting their country and their lives. Ethics must be the basis of the news and information that news media provides and also of the credibility they need to survive.

Today's main debate in the Bhutanese media industry is that the government's "liberal licensing policy" is resulting in a proliferation of too many media houses to be sustained by the small market.

At the CIME forum and almost every media forum in Thimphu, we hear the common lament that the limited advertising revenue is making survival difficult for some news organisations. The Bhutan Observer reported that it has had to close four regional bureaus in the past year as a cost cutting measure.

Also of concern is the fact that the bulk of advertising revenue comes from the government. The reliance on government leaves the media vulnerable to influence, thereby affecting their objectivity. At least one newspaper complained of government pressure to control content.

As global experience shows, ethics is too often compromised in the interest of survival and profit. And it is important to note that some of our Bhutanese media houses are business houses without clear professional media mission or agenda.

Globally, journalism and journalists and media houses face financial problems and there have been experiments, including crowd-sourcing, to get more diverse views and stories without relying on a large pool of reporters. And there's also a strong point of view that only by being profitable can a media business be ethical.

"Profitability, especially when it is based on drawing revenue from a wide variety of sources, enables the media

organisation to resist financial pressures that might otherwise compromise it," said Jim Bettinger, director of the Knight Journalism Fellowship at Stanford University.

But there is no doubt that news organisations that hold fast to their code of ethics and are clear about their values will win out in the long run. The bottom-line is that news media cannot afford to be unethical – or you lose the people you want as your readers/viewers.

If news media serves public interest, which is the true purpose of journalism, they have to be ethical before being profitable.

Healthy media companies understand that being ethical is good for business in the long run. In the commercial world, companies with good ethical practices do better. Examples include sports goods companies that seek society support by moving away from exploitative child labour in developing

countries and markets that stopped importing carpets from the region because they used chemicals and child labour.

The world's communities are becoming more socially conscious and, in the developing world, ethical businesses need to be supported.

News organisations can maintain their credibility by upholding ethical practices and informing their readers/listeners/viewers about their ethics. Keep the editorial and marketing divisions separate. Never let reporters bring in the advertisements.

News organisations should determine what their policies are and they should make these values and ethics public. These values need to be conveyed in their content and the standards must be maintained to ensure information helps us learn about Bhutan and helps us make national decisions.

Let's put it this way: If it's not ethical, is it journalism? The answer is a resounding "No"



BCMD welcomes you to our second volume of Mi-khung.

The 12-paged newsletter shares stories 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.

Find out about BCMD news 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 bcmd@bcmd.bt For more information call 327903. Follow us on facebook: Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy or www.bcmbd.bt.

4

Tips on Media Literacy

Media and Democracy in Bhutan

| www.bcnd.bt

| Volume 2, Issue 1, May 2012

Media Drungtsho: The Reality of Violence in the Media

Today, young children in Bhutan are heavily exposed to various media, including television, videos, movies, music, and computer games. Because of their colour, excitement, and graphic images, media can have a strong influence on children. On the one hand, such media offer powerful tools for learning and entertainment; on the other hand, violence in the media can be damaging to young children.

Extensive research has shown that higher levels of children's exposure to media violence correlate with increased acceptance of aggressive attitudes and increased aggressive behaviour. Recent studies associate exposure to violence in the media with violent behaviours. **Parents can limit young children's access to violent media, and teachers can encourage families to take such steps.**

THE MEDIA DRUNGTSO

1. What you see on TV, video and computer games is not real; its fantasy. No one gets hurt on TV.

2. Real- life violence has consequences: it hurts people, it can make people feel bad, and its against the law.

3. Violence does not solve problems. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.



BCMD wishes to acknowledge and thank the following partners

CSOFF



Media Society Outreach to Eastern Schools



Members of SMS present on the different forms and the core concept of media

■ Karma Tenzin, SMS coordinator

Sherubtse Media Society (SMS) members recently toured schools in eastern Bhutan to educate students about the growth of new media and to highlight the challenges and opportunities presented by this phenomenon.

Discussion topics at one such meeting—held 18 March 2012 at the Jigme Sherubling Higher Secondary School—included the way media affects and shapes society, the problems and merits of using media, media consumption patterns and the sourcing of information from various kinds of media. The presentation was attended by an audience of about 300 students and eight teachers, and opened with a conversation about how media and technology can change human behaviour.

SMS member Yeshi Dorji began the presentation by defining what media means. He also differentiated between the various forms of media and their use in Bhutan while cautioning that misuse of media can lead to crime.

A talk by another SMS member, Karma Tenzin, covering the core concepts of media received general applause from

the audience. He also spoke about media and its manipulation of audience response using techniques such as camera angle, color, sound and special effects. Media presentations can be constructed to gain profit, power and to manipulate people, he said. He used the example of popular advertisements to show the students just how manipulative media can be.

Karma Tenzin and the other final presenter at the Jigme Sherubling talk, Kesang Om, also discussed the impact of popular films on the lifestyles of Bhutanese youth and gender equality in the kingdom.

The discussions generated some startling questions from the audience including some who asked whether the World Wrestling Federation shows were real or staged.

Interested students at Sherubtse College started the Sherubtse Media Society in 2011, following a visit by staff of the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy. The society currently has 81 members including two staff moderators. The SMS receives support from Druk Green Power Corporation, Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy and the Sherubtse College administration. The society publishes a periodic newsletter titled “THE TOWER”.

2nd Media Nomads Workshop

■ Thoepaga Namgyal Dawa, SCoE

A total of 28 Bhutanese teacher trainees and college students were certified at the Second Media Nomads Workshop organised by BCMD.

During the 10-day workshop that began on 14 December 2011, participants learned about teaching media literacy to youth who could then play an active role on the Bhutanese media scene.

The Media Nomads took part in exercises designed to encourage interaction and discussion, and carried out activities

that helped them gain deeper insight into the media and the role it plays in our daily lives.

Among the dignitaries and speakers invited to kick off the workshop were such public figures as the National Council member Sonam Kinga and the Chief of the Anticorruption Commission, Dasho Neten Zam. Other guests included writers, photojournalists, politicians and news reporters.

Speaking at the closing ceremony of the workshop, Dasho Neten Zam of the Anticorruption Commission repeated the slogan: “We care and we dare!”



Students interview a man (second from left) during National Day for a citizen journalism project.



The SMS team takes time for a picture during a break at the workshop at Jigme Sherubling High School.

6 Spreading Media Literacy in Bhutan

Media and Democracy in Bhutan

| www.bcnd.bt

| Volume 2, Issue 1, May 2012

A Lesson in “Active Citizenship”

> Continued from pg. 1

carriage of their precious cars scraped and bumped noisily from the impact with the offending pothole.

For a couple of months everyone seemed inconvenienced by the pothole but no one seemed to bother fixing it. I imagine the drivers thought it was the job of the municipality and the people walking on the sidewalks didn't feel it was their headache as well.

But one day a family that lived on the right side of that road showed up with their spades and filled up the hole, ending the source of entertainment for my friends and me.

In the process, I learned that the power and beauty of democracy lies not with the rich and the famous but in the hands of ordinary people who pull up their sleeves to make things happen.

As Bhutanese people we have grown accustomed to criticising the public services provided by the government, be it health, education, waste management or the maintenance of roads. We are best at brewing hot talk in our living rooms regarding such national and communal issues but choose to live a dormant life outside our homes and apartments.

This feeling that “that's none of my business” or “the government will/should do something about it” mentality must be uprooted if we wish to live a life of active citizens under a new set of democratic institutions. And in doing so we must help in creating a vibrant Democracy for our future generations.

The sad thing about that pothole was that, in all likelihood, as soon as it was left behind by the wheels of the cars that bumped over it the

issue also took a backseat and was soon forgotten. Had the elite people who used the road called the municipality to mend the pothole, it might have been repaired earlier.

It took the civic-minded residents on the right side of the road to finally show up with their spades and a huge pile of dirt to fill up the hole around 7:30 pm, probably sometime after their normal work hours.

It was a simple act of Active Citizenship. It was a huge lesson for me.

Had the family not felt differently from us, the pothole would have kept on growing and entertaining me and other pedestrians with more funny faces and disgrace to the government and the country as a whole.

I recently attended a week-long workshop organised for teachers by the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy called “Media Literacy Curricula Development”. During the workshop, we learned how we as teachers can help instill media literacy in children in our respective schools and motivate them to use media to bring about democratic changes. We learned that we can help them become active citizens and monitor the media so the media reports more responsibly on the issues concerning all of us.

I envision that in the years to come a family of one of my students will come out to mend the road just like the residents of that road. I imagine that they will have several other families coming together to lend their helping hands. And I envision that in a few years all families, pedestrians and drivers will not be waiting or wishing for government agencies to arrive to rescue them.

I envision that they will, instead, have the good sense to be Active Citizens!

Sherubtse College to Start Media Studies Programme

■ BCMD Staff Reporters

Bhutanese students interested in media and journalism will no longer need to travel abroad to seek higher education or training; now, they need only obtain admission to Sherubtse. Starting in July 2012, Sherubtse College will unveil the first undergraduate Media Studies programme in Bhutan for students interested in pursuing a wide variety of careers in media – from report writers to TV producers.

Owing to Bhutan's transition to democracy, the Director of Sherubtse College, Singye Namgyel, said that it was crucial to have a trained class of media professionals who could serve in their roles as the ‘Fourth Estate’ of governance. “The course aims at producing media professionals who will join all sectors of the country: media houses, freelance journalists, etc.,” the Director indicated in an email correspondence. “These professionals will be the eyes and ears of society who will maintain checks and balances between the haves

and have-nots, the elite and the downtrodden, and the rights and the wrongs.”

Emphasis in the programme will be placed on analysis and developing students' ability to assess the roles and impact of media on Bhutanese society. Throughout the course, students will develop journalistic skills and sensibilities that enable them to become more effective and critical users of media tools – broadcast, print, or online.

While students will be unable to develop any specific media production skills (e.g. in animation), the coursework will not be strictly abstract; theory will be balanced with practical sessions in reporting and writing. Students will also be encouraged to integrate their coursework with studies in another discipline already on offer at the College.

Already, the programme has generated a significant amount of interest, with 36 students and counting enrolled in the programme. In the first few years, three faculty members will lead the programme.

Are you looking for something new to read this year?



Check out our new publication, “**More than Just a Vote**” where youth share their perspectives on being a citizen of Bhutan through their stories, essays and pictures.

Copies of books have been distributed to all colleges, high schools and public libraries. Limited copies available at the Junction bookstore in Thimphu.

For more information call BCMD or check out our website.

Understanding a “Culture of Democracy” through Ants

> *Continued from pg. 1*

Furthermore, our friend the newly self-conscious ant begins to communicate her new ideas to her fellow ants and gradually to convince them in one way or another that the old instinctive structures need to be changed to a new set of structures.

What I have been trying to describe, by this analogy, is the question of “culture.” For our purposes, the traditional instinctive structures that governed the behaviour of the ants before our friend began to develop self-consciousness and new ideas is describable as a culture, just as the new structures that will now begin to govern the behaviour of the ant community is also a culture, a culture that develops out of the growing self-consciousness of the ant society beginning as we described and spreading to a greater or lesser extent to the other members of society.

This analogy can help us to formulate several problems:

First, how do the members of the ant society learn the new structures and how do they understand them as guides of their behaviour

Second, why do they accept the new structures that our friend wants to introduce? Are they as self-conscious as the ant who is introducing new structures or are they accepting them simply because of the pattern of accepted repetition of behaviour that has always characterised them?

Third, if they are self-conscious of the novelty, why do they accept it rather than resist it in order to continue in their old patterns of behaviour? Do they accept the new patterns willingly, as acts of the same kind of self-conscious choice that characterised the decision of our first new-age ant? And

if so, how do they arrive at the willingness to accept them? What happens to those who do not wish to accept them? And so forth and so on.

It is quite obvious that we are talking about two relatively distinct cultures, the culture of traditional instinctive behaviours, and the new culture whose behaviour patterns have been changed by conscious decision but with consequences not yet clear. We need to investigate further if we are to discover whether the new culture has simply been accepted because of the unconscious pattern of acceptance of the old culture or whether the new culture has been accepted because of the conscious exercise of will on the part of the ants.

Are the rules that govern behaviour in the new culture determined by the ants themselves, in the same way as the first self-conscious ant introduced the new patterns of active will determined by herself, or are they simply new rules introduced according to the old rubrics. How are the new rules, if it is the responsibility of the ants to determine them themselves, conceptualised, deliberated, and introduced? How were the members of the ant colony in the old society of instinctive behaviours educated to transform themselves into self-conscious members of the new culture or did they simply follow patterns of predetermined behaviours to account for changes?

This is the way in which we can begin to ask questions about the culture that determines how the new society that emerges through change from instinct or tradition on the one hand to self-consciousness and choice on the other prepares its citizens for full self-conscious participation, for creative decision-making, in the New World they now inhabit.

Strengthening understanding of democracy in schools through news literacy



Teachers design lesson plans to strengthen the idea of citizenship.

> *Continued from pg. 1*

use their new rights to be effective citizens.

The Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy works with parents and teachers to help families develop mindful media consumption habits. “Our contribution to their efforts is the focus on news as the oxygen of democracy. There’s a lot of good reporting going on in Bhutan, but there’s also the opportunity to put the news consumer in the driver’s seat, demanding quality journalism that supports intelligent self-rule,” said Miller.

“At the same time that Bhutan, a Buddhist country, suddenly confronts global youth culture and consumer culture, its citizens are also confronting new responsibilities as voters,” Miller said. “Bhutan’s constitution, unlike ours, is quite specific about duties, including the duty of every citizen to “uphold justice and fight corruption.”

During the workshops, teachers prioritised numerous lessons to help students connect that duty and the right to vote to their human rights to information and free expression. By the end of a week-long workshop, BCMD had gathered more than a dozen new democracy-and-media lessons custom built for Bhutan’s schools.

Among the lessons devel-

oped in Thimphu were sessions aimed at primary and secondary students. In addition to explaining the democratic process, the new classroom materials push students to explore the value of reliable information in their roles as voters and as citizens. Class exercises on how to responsibly share information, how to hold the news media accountable for errors and how to engage in useful debate were built by teachers working.

“We are especially happy with the lessons built around debate and discourse, something that we’ve identified as a need in Bhutan,” said Pek-Dorji. “This will help open up young minds to the very important element of learning to listen to all views, even opposing views. So often the democratic debates we see on TV are more like “shouting matches” – people trying to stem the thoughts from the other party just because they are from the “other side”. If we learn to listen, debate, deliberate and to be civil to those who think differently, then our democratic transition will be that much more vibrant and healthy.”

BCMD has been promoting media and democracy literacy through media clubs and in specially targeted production camps to enable people to use and create media to focus on society around us.

8

Chit Chat

Media and Democracy in Bhutan

| www.bcnd.bt

| Volume 2, Issue 1, May 2012

Media Training for Local Government



Gewog Administrative officers learn about the importance of information sharing in their gewogs.

BCMD's Second Annual Media Sensitisation Workshop, from January 9-11, 2012, trained 45 Gewog Administration Officers (GAOs) representing their local governments to write news releases and engage the public on the Internet.

The GAOs also learned how access to information can help create an open society and greater transparency in development activities. A session called "Meet the Press" gave them an opportunity to meet members of the media and learn from them.

Media Nomads III



The participants having an question and answer session with National Council member Sonam Kinga.

The Third Media Nomads workshop taught 28 college students and recent graduates news writing, interviewing techniques and critical analysis of the media and its impact in our daily lives.

The workshop held from December 14 to 24, 2011, aimed at fostering citizen journalism among the youth, also covered constitutional rights and freedoms related to the media, ethical guidelines for engagement via the media and the benefits and pitfalls of social media use.

The participants were drawn from the Paro College of Education, the Samtse College of Education, the Royal Thimphu College, Gedu's College of Business Studies, Sherubtse College of Kanglung, Sona College of Technology (India), Indo Asian College (India) and the EILM University (India).

Media Nomads IV



Sangay Rinchen, founder of the Happy Green Co-operative giving an inspiring press conference to the participants of Media Nomads.

Participants of the Fourth Media Nomads Workshop told Mi-Khung they felt better informed about their rights and responsibilities as Bhutanese citizens, about the importance of storytelling, and how to think in terms of the greater public good.

They also said they also now had a better understanding about the importance of the role of journalists in promoting better democratic ideals.

The workshop held from January 23 to 27, 2012, was attended by 29 participants from the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, the Royal Thimphu College, Lungtenzampa Higher Secondary School, Kelki High School, and Rinchen Higher Secondary School. It was held at the World Wildlife Fund's Conference Hall in Thimphu.

What is a Culture of Democracy?- A forum



ACC Chairperson, Dasho Neten Zangmo talking about the importance of citizens embracing their collective responsibilities.

A recent BCMD forum titled "The Culture of Democracy", featuring a distinguished panel of speakers, was held on April 6, 2012.

The panelists included Dasho Neten Zangmo from the Anti-corruption Commission of Bhutan, Bjorn Forde the Director of the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy and Professor Mark Mancall, Professor Emeritus at Stanford University. Bhutanese representatives of local civil societies, the media, government officials and foreign visitors attended the forum.

Although the idea was to explore generally what a culture of

democracy means for Bhutan a wide range of topics emerged from the discussions.

Dasho Neten Zangmo at the forum said, “Democracy is only as good as it’s civic culture. Citizens need to play an active role in establishing a strong system of governance.”

Photography for the Young



Participants from Loselling & Changzamtog School taking pictures of “Something I like”.

BCMD and Photokidz Club from Thimphu’s Youth Centre held a joint training in photography recently.

Students attended the basic and intermediate course in photography from Loselling, Changzamtog, and Choki Traditional Arts School. Others included past participants of the workshop (this was the second of its kind) and out-of-school youth. The children studied techniques like framing, perspective and angles. They also learned about various types of special-interest photography.



Picture taken by one of the participants of Photokidz workshop

Photography counselors Wee Tan and Jeanette also taught the students how to control shutter speed, set camera functions for varying conditions, and capture images on macro settings.

In a separate training for teachers Photokidz founder Wee Tan and Jeanette (who is a volunteer for Photokidz) covered the finer points of leading photography workshops in their respective fields. The two trainers shared tips on making photography fun for students and how the medium can be used as a means of expression for young people.

Can we have Democracy without an Open Society? - A forum



Sangay Khandu, National Council Member talking about good governance.

To examine the idea of an “open society” and explore what it means for Bhutan, BCMD hosted a half-day forum at Tarayana Hall with an audience of 54 participants from civil society, media, government, and abroad. The forum featured speeches from Honorable National Council member Sangay Khandu, UN Democracy Fund Director Roland Rich, and Stanford Professor Mark Mancall. Participants at the forum discussed issues relating transparency and accountability in Bhutan’s society, the importance of education in nurturing open debate, and the cultural barriers to ‘openness’.

Difficulty in the Access to Quality Information Undermines Press Freedom - a forum for youth on World Press Freedom Day



Youth expressing their understanding of what Press Freedom means on a piece of canvas.

On the occasion of Press Freedom Day, BCMD hosted a half-day forum on the topic: *Difficulty in the Access to Quality Information Undermines Press Freedom*. In attendance were 143 students from Paro College of Education, Yangchenphug High School, Royal Thimphu College, Royal Institute of Management, and the Royal Institute of Health Sciences, as well as teachers and observers from various organizations. At the forum, students engaged with members of the media fraternity in a conversation on the Right to Information Act (RTI) and its implication for journalists, ethical issues in reporting, and the “culture of secrecy” that inhibits data collection.

10 Focus on Media

Media and Democracy in Bhutan

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Tête-à-tête with a Journalist on the Journalist Association of Bhutan.

1. What is the purpose of the Journalists Association of Bhutan (JAB)?

Passang Dorji: According to the association's charter, some of its most important mandates are to protect and promote the constitutional right to information, freedom of expression, and media; maintain and promote a high standard of ethical behaviour in the practice of journalism; foster a growing number of professionally trained journalists, and protect journalists from hazards such as threats, harassments, and litigation from interest groups.

Other purposes of JAB include to support journalists who are seriously injured or permanently disabled or killed in the line of duty through compensatory grants; explore funding sources to collaborate in professional education programs for journalists; institute mechanism to recognise journalists through awards and grants; stimulate and sustain professional debate on crucial issues through seminars, workshops, and discussion fora.

2. It's been five years since the last attempt to form JAB floundered in 2007. How will this JAB avoid the failures of the previous effort?

Passang Dorji: The landscape of the Bhutanese media has seen a sea change since 2007. The number of news outlets/organisations has grown by leaps and bounds, with 11 newspapers in print today. And the number of media professionals has also grown as much as media organisations. Associations like JAB could not be more relevant, timely, and important to help the Bhutanese media grow with its own mission and direction.

The previous JAB was not able to take off for want of funds. It is very encouraging that a few organisations are willing to support the new one. This gives us no reason to flounder this time.

Importantly, thanks to the founding members (most of them senior journalists) of JAB. They revived the association this year that remained dysfunctional for several years. They have shown the direction for the association. The newly elected office bearers are comfortable to carry on their good deeds to make the association a success.

3. How does JAB plan to do in the upcoming year? What are JAB's priorities in terms of improving the professionalism of journalism in Bhutan?

Passang Dorji: At the moment, we are working on establishing the association's office and the Press Club – which will enable us to provide a platform for our journalists and members of society to interact to exchange ideas and promote public discourse.

The steering committee of JAB is planning a host of activities for this year. They include workshops and seminars to promote professionalism in the practice of journalism, and media awards to recognise our journalists.

We want to collaborate with relevant institutions both at home and abroad to conduct trainings and explore opportunities for our journalists to grow in their profession. Professional capacity development through both short-term and long-term training opportunities is our overriding priority.

4. Does JAB have a role in preparing journalists for the 2013 elections?

Passang Dorji: Emphasizing on preparing our journalists for the 2013 elections might be myopic on the association's part. We intend to focus on ensuring a progressive development of our journalists in

covering areas beyond and including politics like culture, environment, economy, society and education, among others. However, it does not mean that JAB is not going to do anything to prepare our journalists for the upcoming elections. Resources permitting, we will do what we can. It is our responsibility as an association.

5. Sangay Khandu, Gasa NC member, will submit the RTI bill for deliberation in the next session of Parliament. If passed, how (if at all) will it benefit Bhutanese journalists?

Passang Dorji: First of all, congratulations to MP Sangay Khandu for sponsoring the RTI Bill. It deviates from the practice in Bhutan where government agencies draft the bills for our MPs to deliberate in Parliament. I hope other MPs will follow suit. In most vibrant and mature democracies, MPs sponsor private bills drafted after understanding ground realities to ensure laws benefit the people.

Our Constitution guarantees the right to information, freedom of expression, and media. The absence of Right to Information Act (RTI Act) could become a stumbling block for the people to enjoy their constitutional right. If the RTI Bill gets endorsed, it will benefit Bhutanese journalists as they will be able to disseminate right information to the people – to whom they are accountable – on time. Right to information is one thing, but right to right information at the right time is a different thing altogether. Journalists always look for that and RTI Act is supposed to ensure it happens.

6. With 11 newspapers and counting, the press is developing at an unprecedented rate in Bhutan. What are your views on media development in Bhutan?

Passang Dorji: Such a pace of growth is evident in most developing countries, especially in emerging democracies like Bhutan. Some newspapers might appear and disappear. If the trend is interpreted positively, it promotes diverse and pluralistic media. However, at the moment, the newspaper market in Bhutan is in a state of glut. The effect could be a dilution in the essence of journalism in the race to survive.

Therefore, our policymakers need to show the way for the media to go forward. This is important given the fact that all newspapers rely on the earnings from government advertisements. At the end of the day, the contribution of media to the growth of society will depend on the number of quality journalists and news organisations and not just the physical number of news outlets.

7. In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges that journalists face in Bhutan?

Passang Dorji: At times our journalists have to run the risk of misinforming the readers when they are pushed from pillar to post to get information. They end up collecting information from alternative sources, which might not be accurate. Our newsmakers, especially bureaucrats, must understand the role of the media and journalists better. Most of the challenges our journalists face would be a thing of the past if our bureaucrats cut down their list of 'CLASSIFIED' information.

Of course, the lack of adequate experience, training, and exposure, as well, hinder the growth of journalism in Bhutan.

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Passang Dorji, who writes for *The Bhutanese*, is President of the
Journalists Association of Bhutan (JAB)
.....

BCMD Events Calendar: Upcoming activities

What: Journalism Seminar on 'Covering Economics and Finance'

When: May 28- 31, 2012

Why: Train Journalists who cover economics, finance and business in technical knowledge as well as professional skills. The seminar is aimed at improving that knowledge and those skills among senior business reporters and editors from Bhutan.

For whom: Journalists
BCMD in partnership with Columbia University's Institute of Policy Dialogue (IPD)

Resource person: Anya Schrifin, Columbia University & Graham Watts.

What: Media, Democracy and Civic Participation Seminar

When: June 18-21, 2012

Why: To sensitise teacher trainees and student leaders on the role of media in a democracy and how media can promote meaningful dialogue. To explore means by which we can promote public discourse and public space in Bhutan, especially in schools.

For whom: Teacher trainees from Paro and Samtse College of Education

What : Creative Non-fiction Writing Workshop

When: June 11- 15, 2012

Why: Writing factual stories can be a creative process. BCMD will conduct a four and half day workshop on how to write non fiction feature stories. The workshop will concentrate on characterisation, narrative plotting, scene setting, point of view, tone and style to make factual stories come alive.

For whom: Feature writers, non fiction story tellers and anyone interested.

Resource person: James R. Bettinger, Stanford University.

[See chit chat section, page 8 & 9, for activities conducted]

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BHUTAN SPEAKS
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12 Citizen's Guide

Media and Democracy in Bhutan

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| Volume 2, Issue 1, May 2012

What does it mean to be a citizen?



"A citizen is one who thinks globally and acts locally so that the individual matters to bring about positive change."

**Choki Gyeltshen, Student,
Yangchenphug higher secondary school**



"To be able to enjoy all the rights and privileges that the country has to offer, without being subjected to discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity and other statuses."

Rinzin Dema, Student, Royal Thimphu College



"A citizen is someone who would respect and serve the Tsa- Wa- Sum with loyalty."

Tandin, Taxi Driver



"A good citizen will always love and respect his/her country and King and will always pray for their well being. It is also about being a helpful person in your community."

Aiti Maya, Housewife



"To be the caretaker of a boy even if he is not your brother."

Gaytari Bhandari, Teacher, Druk School



"An individual whose identity is registered in a country and is vested with the rights and privileges as per the country's law."

**Lhacho Wangmo, Gewog Administrative Officer,
Wangdue Phodrang**

The 7 Fundamental Rights of a Bhutanese Citizen

As citizens it is our moral duty to vote but our duty doesn't just stop there. As we witness our country enter its fourth year of democracy it is time to reflect on the rights we have as citizens. Here are some essential fundamental rights as described in Bhutan's Constitution.

1. A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech, opinion and expression.
2. A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to information.
3. A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. No person shall be compelled to belong to another faith by means of coercion or inducement.
4. There shall be freedom of the press, radio and television and other forms of dissemination of information, including electronic and media.
5. A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to vote.
6. A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to equal access and opportunity to join the Public Service.
7. A person shall not be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence nor be made subject to unlawful attacks on the person's honour and reputation.

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