

MI-KHUNG

Media and Democracy in Bhutan

Youth to role-play as MPs

BY PHUNTSHO NAMGAY
BCMD

The Parliament of Bhutan is soon expected to lead mock parliamentary sessions for students in four to five schools in Bhutan. Part of the Parliament Education and Awareness Programme for the youth of Bhutan, the initiative is aimed at giving the Bhutanese youth a political voice.

The initiative is expected to enhance the youth's knowledge and participation in the political life of the country. It will help the youth role-play as elected members in a typical parliamentary setting.

The Parliament's initiative for the youth is closely related to the concept

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Thangza village in Lunana which is threatened by a glacial lake outburst flood. BCMD's Journalism Fellowship last year took a reporter beyond this village to cover rural stories.

Bhutanese news media in their humblest state

BY NEEDRUP ZANGPO
BCMD

Nine private newspapers combined today have only 44 journalists, 4.8 journalists a newspaper on average. This is hardly the staff strength of one newspaper six years ago. In 2008, Bhutan Observer newspaper, which has now folded, had 57 employees.

Bhutan Times, Bhutan's first private newspaper, is operating with three journalists today, according to December 2014 figures of the Bhutan Media Foundation (BMF).

In its heyday between 2006 and 2008, the paper was 20 journalists strong - eight reporters at its headquarters, nine correspondents, one editor, and two subeditors.

Business Bhutan, which now

operates with seven journalists, boasted a team of 15 journalists between 2011 and 2012.

Kuensel and Bhutan Broadcasting Service together have 95 journalists, meaning the state-owned media comprise 68.35 percent of the Bhutanese news media in terms of the number of newsroom staff.

Although staff number is only one indicator of a media house's strength, it is a strong indicator having direct bearing on professionalism, volume and frequency of news content, and its reach.

All private newspapers have lost most of their senior journalists and are struggling to pay the remaining few who keep the papers going by mostly

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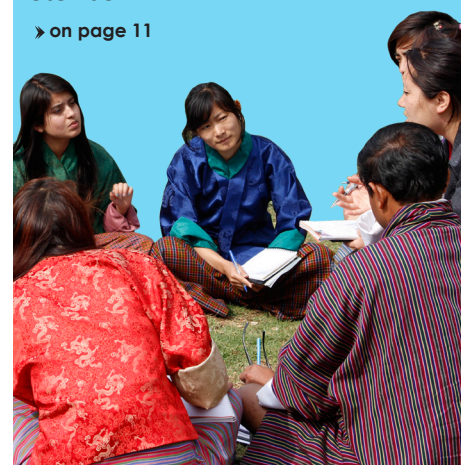
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Bhutanese media in their humblest state

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publishing press releases. Most of them are young reporters who are forced to become editors overnight when their editors and seniors quit.

Salary is rarely paid in full or on time in most of the nine private newspapers. A weekly pays its staff in three installments. It has operated without the Internet and landline phone for the past three months. A young reporter with the paper says she uses her personal mobile phone for the little reporting she does.

Another reporter with a private newspaper says she is 'paid sometimes fully and sometimes half'. She says there is hardly any enthusiasm or inspiration

to work.

And the print run of the newspapers has reportedly shrunk drastically. One Dzongkha paper prints only 600 copies a week. Three years back, the Dzongkha newspaper with the smallest print run printed 1,500 copies.

Yet, the newspapers stubbornly hang on to their licences, albeit without any impact. The frustrated media managers, in their lighter moments, joke that the private newspapers' prolonged paralysis in the ICU is costing the Bhutanese society the much-needed democratic culture.

A senior journalist says the Bhutanese media are 'direction-less'. This view is echoed by the executive

director of BMF who says no private newspaper has submitted a viable business plan to the foundation although it has set aside some money, through Swiss Development Fund, to help the dying newspapers. The papers are waiting for handouts, which is not forthcoming.

Recently, the private newspapers appealed to the government, through the newly formed Media Owners' Association of Bhutan, to help them merge through the provision of a grant. The same years-old appeal for money is in the government's court.

Meanwhile, Bhutan fell 12 places in Reporters Without Borders' press freedom ranking in 2014.

Youth to role-play as MPs

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of 'youth parliament' that has been under discussion in Bhutan since 2013. A youth parliament, usually formed by young people for young people, not only helps young people understand lawmaking and policy deliberation procedures, but also helps them use their voice in creative and constructive ways.

Many democratic countries in the world have a youth parliament. The UK Youth Parliament (UKYP), for example, has hundreds of members elected annually in every part of the country. They work with MPs and local officials to ensure that the views of the young people are adequately represented in decision-making processes. The UKYP was started in the 1990s by an MP.

The Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) in 2014 floated the idea of establishing a youth parliament in Bhutan.

A youth parliament is expected to be a non-partisan body guided by a set of working procedures.

In the meantime, the UNDP is supporting the Parliament and ECB to initiate ground work on a youth parliament in Bhutan. In February, it coordinated a meeting to understand what the Parliament and ECB were



High school and college youth take part in Youth Initiative dialogue in 2014

doing on the project. The first technical group meeting on the project is scheduled on April 13.

A similar initiative – possibly the first stab at an initiative similar to a youth parliament – is the Youth Initiative (YI) of the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) piloted in 2013. Initially known as the 'Youth Parliament of Bhutan' and later renamed as the 'Youth Initiative for Debate, Deliberation and Development', the YI is an informal, non-partisan, affiliated association that gives a select group of youth practical, hands-on experience in deliberating on national issues and taking community-based action.

The idea, first conceived by two high school youth and a BCMD staff

member, has been successfully carried forward by a committed group of youth representatives. Today, the members of the YI have proven that Bhutanese youth are capable of bringing change to society.

How has the YI worked? Sangay Thinley, a member of the YI, never tires of taking on youth-related challenges. A 2014 high school graduate, Sangay is unemployed, but occasionally works as a certified tour guide.

As part of the YI, Sangay played a key role in organising a reading campaign in Thimphu last year. He also played a lead role on behalf of Go Youth Go in BCMD's Democracy Day Challenge, an initiative for the citizens to undertake a socially beneficial project with a small grant.

Sangay recently visited 437 bars in Thimphu advocating responsible sale of alcohol. He is discussing his ideas with the Ministry of Health to carry his alcohol campaign forward.

Sangay is now working with BCMD on a new project to create a three-minute music video to promote reading among the Bhutanese to commemorate the 60th birth anniversary of His Majesty the fourth Druk Gyalpo. Sangay says most of his initiatives have been carried out through his engagement with the YI.

Thirteen new CSOs join the third sector

BY TSHERING N UDEN
BCMD

Bhutan's civil society is now 47 organisations strong. Last year, the Civil Society Organisations Authority licensed six Mutual Benefit Organisations and seven Public Benefit organisations.

Among the newly registered civil society organisations (CSOs) are the Journalists' Association of Bhutan (JAB), Voluntary Artists' Studio of Thimphu (VAST), and Bhutan Transparency Initiative (BTI).

JAB, which existed since 2008 as an informal group, aims to protect the interests of Bhutanese journalists and maintain and promote a high standard of ethical behaviour in the practice of journalism. It also aims to foster a growing number of professionally trained journalists in the country.

BTI aims to foster a culture of transparency and accountability in the country.

"We cannot ignore and brush aside corruption issues and leave it only to the Anti-Corruption Commission but do something as individuals, as groups and as a movement to overcome the threats of corruption," said the executive director of BTI, former MP Pema Lhamo.

BTI hopes to contribute to translating the noble vision of Bhutan's Kings to keep Bhutan free of corruption into reality, according to Pema Lhamo.

VAST hopes to nurture the creative talents of the Bhutanese youth and help them learn to decipher moral and ethical values concealed in works of art. By providing a physical space, VAST hopes to promote volunteerism and spread social awareness through art, besides highlighting the importance of Bhutan's rich cultural heritage.

The quarterly meeting of the CSOs on 18 March at BCMD's media lab in Thimphu discussed the sustainability of the CSOs and public education on civil society, among others. The meeting also discussed and highlighted the role of CSOs to complement the efforts of the government.

The National Assembly passed the Civil Society Organisations Act of Bhutan on 20 June 2007 to facilitate the establishment and growth of CSOs in the country. Subsequently on 20 March 2009, the government established the Civil Society Organisations Authority as the regulatory agency to implement the CSO Act.

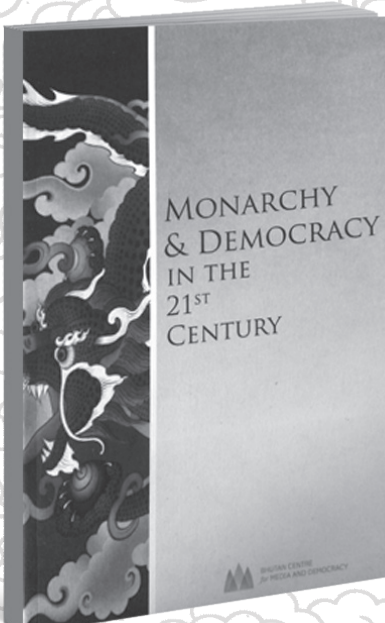
Civil society is often known as the

third sector, the non-political and not-for-profit public space between the government, which is responsible for public service, and the private sector, which is driven by profit.

The first registered CSOs in Bhutan are the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy and The Loden Foundation. They were registered on 12 March 2010.

NEWLY REGISTERED CSOs

1. Bhutan Centre for Entrepreneurship
2. Bhutan Film Association
3. Bhutan Transparency Initiative
4. Cine Bhutan
5. Clean Bhutan
6. Gaedsho Lhayi Drangsong Tshogpa
7. Hotel & Restaurant Association of Bhutan
8. Jangling Community Service Association
9. Journalists' Association of Bhutan
10. Ogyen Choling Foundation
11. Remoen
12. Royal Society for Protection and Care of Animals
13. VAST-Bhutan (Voluntary Artists' Studio of Thimphu)



Sixteen journalists and scholars met in Paro, Bhutan, on May 2009 to share their views on the role of monarchy in the context of emerging democracies in the 21st century. Their conversation prompted this collection of essays on monarchies around the world, through different periods of history.

Available at Junction Bookstore.
You can also order the book from the
Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy
Contact: 02-327903
email: bcmd@bcmd.bt
www.bcmd.bt

Reporter travels north to report glacial threat

A reporter records the ordeals of reporting from Bhutan's treacherous highlands

BY JIGME WANGCHUK
KUENSEL

A mild autumn morning in Gasa, 3 September 2014. To the south from the majestic 17th century Gasa Dzong, the Kang Bum Mountain (5,771m) is a solitary giant.

High up in the mountains, the ice is melting fast. Lakes are getting bigger. Another glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) could be looming. Below the threatening lakes are the three communities of Thangza, Tenche, and Tshojo.

It is my mission to find out how the highland communities are grappling with climate change and the resulting treat of a GLOF.

They faced the wrath of nature in 1994. The swelling source of Phochu came roaring down from Lugge Tsho and took away a Tshojo woman and her two children. The flood caused destruction worth millions downstream.

Porters from Laya have arrived with horses. Aaron Putnam and Nicholas Young, two scientists from Columbia University in the USA, and Chimi Dorji from the Department of Hydro-Met Services are going to Lunana to study the lakes.

As a BCMD-funded reporter, I think about my mission. I feel brave and important. I feel larger than life. With three porters from Laya and 21 horses, we are a big team.

We camp at a sad spot a few hours before reaching Koina. The sun is going down, and it begins to rain, hard and heavy as it does up there.

In the morning, Aaron's tent is in a frothing swamp. Nicholas is hopping from one end of his tent to another with a toothbrush in his hand. And the flies, deadly little flies, are the real bloodsuckers.

Taktshi Makhang is a military outpost a few kilometres before Laya. There are some severely bearded soldiers of Indian Military Training Team.

From Laya, we go to a place called Rodophu. It is 6 September. Rodophu is the first place where people start to get altitude sickness. Nicholas is lagging behind. He has a mild background headache. My ears begin to pop. Rodochu, white as milk, is fast and roiling.

Ganglakarchung (5,220m), the highest peak between Laya and Lunana, is our challenge tomorrow. From here, it is just cold, rocks and ice, the domain of the Nep (guardian deity) Lobzang Drap. My head feels like it is being hit by a massive sledgehammer. I just want to lie down and

disappear into oblivion.

And it is cold, very cold.

The day breaks with a surprise, bright. But, soon, it begins to rain again. A horse falls off the trail and is dying. But we have no time to wait. We move on, leaving the dying beast in the cold and rain. Lhedi, a small settlement with a school and a BHU, is just a few hours up from here.

It's a sunny afternoon. I can see the school in Lhedi opposite the sandy banks of Phochu. And there I find Sangay groaning with pain. The advance team has left him behind because here, in the mountain, time is essential.

I help Sangay up and give him my walking stick. The BHU has nothing much save some painkiller tablets. Sangay, a hardy mountain man, doesn't like medicines. I can see Chimi, Aaron, Nicholas, and our guide Dorji, climbing up the crest. I leave Sangay with my energy bars. I must run.

The desolateness of the place is beginning to worry me. I haven't got even a single story for BCMD yet. I look down at the fast flowing Phochu and try a Haiku or two:

Rivers run, uncaring

Leaving the pebbles bare and nude

A hermit in the cave

Alongside Chukarpo towards Sephu, my fingers begin to swell. I cannot make a fist, and I am all wet and having a really nasty headache. It has been raining nonstop for the past one week. Sephu is only a few days away, though, and this is some relief.

Sangay's condition is worsening, but we can hardly do anything. Our satellite phone does not work. I run up to a herder's camp where B-mobile signal shows. I call my sister in Thimphu.

I leave a message and our coordinates with one Colnel Rinzin of the Royal Bhutan Army for an emergency helicopter service: "N27 degrees 42.937 minutes, E90 degrees 17.13 minutes. Near Omte Tsho. We are heading towards Maruthang."

Now Sangay coughs blood. He wants to say something but he can barely whisper. There is a heavy silence. He is dead. We carry the body down to Mauruthang, seven hours in the rain. In the morning we haul the body until RBA soldiers meet us at a place called Bazha.

BCMD has so far engaged with around 450 students in social media conversations. Our observation is that most of them use social media to share pictures and personal moments without realising its implications. Therefore, we present this guide.

HOW TO BE A SMART SOCIAL MEDIA USER

DO NOT SHARE YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION

This includes your phone number, location, and banking details, among others.

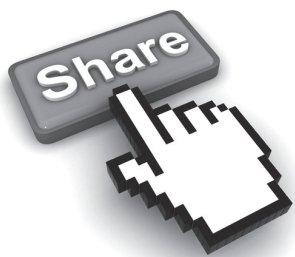


SPREAD A GOOD HEART

Be kind and show respect for other people and their views. If you wouldn't say it in person, don't say it online.

THINK BEFORE YOU POST

A bad reputation could be a click away. Before you press the 'send' button, imagine the last person in the world that you would want seeing what you post.



MAKE IT A BETTER WORLD FOR EVERYONE

Share and spread good stuff. Create, share, tag, comment and contribute to the online world in positive ways.

BE CAUTIOUS

Remember that not everyone is who they say they are. Stand against bullies online.



YOUR RIGHTS

According to the Constitution



& DUTIES

of the Kingdom of Bhutan

PROTECT AND DEFEND THE COUNTRY

STAND AGAINST INJURY, TORTURE OR KILLING

FOSTER THE SPIRIT OF BROTHERHOOD

SAFEGUARD PUBLIC PROPERTY

PAY TAXES

**Duty
To**

UPHOLD JUSTICE AND ACT AGAINST CORRUPTION

PRESERVE THE ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

RESPECT NATIONAL FLAG AND NATIONAL ANTHEM

HELP VICTIMS OF ACCIDENTS AND NATURAL CALAMITY

Looking Back

Teachers Learn Media Literacy



BCMD organised a four-day workshop on Educating for Citizenship: Media and Democracy Literacy from 3 to 6 February. The workshop trained a new cohort of 30 teachers from the Royal Education Council seed schools of Chukha Dzongkhag and two teachers from Thimphu and Dagana. The workshop aimed at creating a better understanding of the importance of media literacy among the participants and to provide skills to become perceptive news consumers.

Youth discuss social issues



Twenty-seven members of Youth Initiative (YI) from high schools and colleges discussed the Bhutanese education system, sustainable development, and social media policy in the country on 5 January in Thimphu. Supported by BCMD, the YI tries to address some important challenges in the country.

GAOs learn to be effective media focal persons

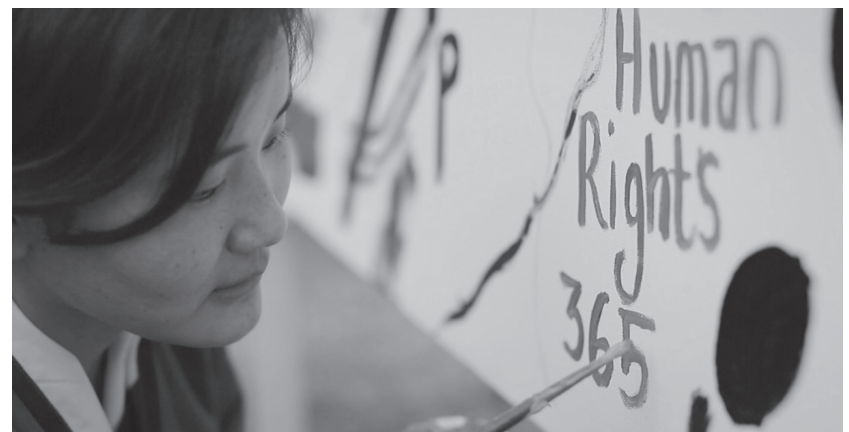


Twenty-one gewog administrative officers (GAO) attended a three-day media sensitisation workshop in Thimphu from 19 to 21 November 2014. Aimed at making the GAOs effective in sharing public information, the workshop was part of BCMD's continuing series of media sensitisation workshops for GAOs.

Coming Your Way



At least 25 members of BCMD's media nomads are going to undertake a community mapping exercise in July. This year, the participants will move out of Thimphu, most preferably to Paro, to undertake the exercise. Community mapping is a BCMD initiative to identify problems in a community and seek solutions to them.



BCMD will this month launch a DVD featuring all BCMD-produced videos. The videos include those produced under the themes such as 'Promoting Local Produce', 'Youth in Bhutan', and 'Media and Democracy'.

Join us every month for Open Mic Night at BCMD's Media Lab in the YDF complex to express your views on issues that you are concerned about. It is an informal forum for exchange of views and thoughts. If you want to express yourself, think Open Mic Night.



BCMD will lead a two-day facilitation training for the members of Youth Initiative and Young Active Citizens, and other interested youth on April 11 and 12. Led by the Institute for Management Studies, the training is aimed at giving facilitation and presentation skills to the youth.

We can put social media to a better public use

BY DORJI WANGDI
ILCS

Social media in Bhutan is failing to play an important role because it is seldom used as a space for constructive discussion and criticism in the interest of the society at large. It has largely become a space for social networking and personal interaction.

It is rare to see our policymakers use social media to seek feedback and comments from the public on important national issues. It is also rare to find members of the public take an interest in posting their opinions on issue of public interest.

As a matter of fact, we mostly see social media being used for personal reasons such as marketing second-hand stuff, venting frustration, or broadcasting personal activities.

However, the Facebook page B-bay - Buying & Selling Second-hand Stuff in Bhutan is far sensible than some Facebook pages that offer space for so-called issues of social interest. Sharing posts that make fun of others outnumber serious thoughts and views intended to contribute to discussion.

It is easier to see pictures of newly bought cars or new-born babies on social media than the pictures of backward communities and underprivileged people who need the attention of the politicians, policymakers and the government.

Social media in Bhutan runs the risk of being increasingly used as a public space for romance, grievances, and personal activities. Although interaction on social media has certain benefits such as building communities, sharing what one has eaten for lunch, how one is tormented by a terrible hangover, and what one's child said the other day are anything but mental junk.

An increasing number of Bhutanese today spend hours everyday on social media. There has been criticism that our public servants spend too much time on social media. That has led to the blocking of Facebook in government offices. This measure will definitely help improve public service delivery. But instead of shunning the powerful tool altogether, can we turn things around and use social media



for public service delivery?

While the Bhutanese have embraced social media, it is not put to the best use. In fact, it is often used for gross entertainment, defamation, rumour, and abuse, among others. Last year's incident of circulating local porn video clips on WeChat is a case in point. Such incidents point to the need for more media literacy.

Anonymous users post unfounded allegations and defame others, thus putting them at the mercy of the average social media user who has little or no media literacy. Many social media users fail to understand that all information posted on social media is not correct. Consequently, this shapes the opinion of users. Defaming someone through anonymous comments is one of the ugliest sides of social media in Bhutan.

Although we cannot deny the positive side of social media, there is much room for improvement in the way we use it to optimise its benefits. Otherwise, social media will snatch precious time from our youth, defamation will thrive, and media illiterate people will feed on unfounded allegations and rumours.

We can find on Facebook many youth who are barely in their teens. There are many questions that we need to ask. Why do they use social media? What do they do on social media? It is important to teach them to use social media for educational purposes.

We need to go beyond social networking to reap full benefits of social media.

Who is a responsible social media user?

If majority used social media not as a photo album but posted on issues concerning the public or commented on issues raised, it could lead to healthy outcome. Policymakers and businesses could use it to provide better services to the public. On the other hand, if we used social media to post our personal pictures and pour our feelings, we aren't putting it to effective use. We are responsible social media users. We have the tool, let's not miss the target.

As advised by Sacha Penchen, a Buddhist scholar, words should remain at the throat before giving them utterance while examining who is going to listen to them. Responsible social media users are those who would consider all viewers and followers before posting anything. This means using social media for constructive purposes. On the consumer's front, responsible social media users are those who make responsible use of contents they receive. In brief, responsible social media users are those who can differentiate between good and bad contents.

A responsible social media user is someone who uses the sites to educate and inform people without infringing on their privacy. A responsible social media user is also someone who, in the act of self-expression and self-promotion, respects other people's feelings and emotions. A responsible social media user is someone who bears the importance of the country's security and harmony of the society in mind while expressing his or her views.



UGYEN TSHERING, former MP



SAMTEN YESHI, Researcher, Shejun



TASHI DEMA, Journalist, Kuensel

Old wisdom for contemporary times

ཕ་རབ་གཅིག་གི་སློ་རྩེ་ལས། ཕ་འབྲིང་གསུམ་གྱིས་གྲོས་བསྟུར་དགའ།

The discussion of three mediocre men is better than the intelligence of an exceptional man.

Students call for more rural stories

BY TSHEWANG LHAMO
BCMD

The media students of Sherubtse College called for more rural stories in the Bhutanese news media which are more representative of Bhutan today. The students suggested stories that give strength and encouragement, provide solutions, and highlight resilience.

More than 100 media students, who took part in a day-long seminar titled *Telling the Rural Story: Is There a Bhutanese Approach to Journalism?* at Sherubtse College on 27 March identified a number of stories they would like the media to cover – stories about rural talents like that of a self-trained electrician, stories that touch people's lives and inspire change, and those of local role models. The students said the media should cover more stories about successful educated youth farmers instead of their unemployed peers.

Led by a BCMD team and two senior journalists, the seminar discussed the importance and challenges of covering rural stories, the importance of citizens' voice in a democracy, and current trends in news coverage, among others.

The seminar provided a platform for practising and aspiring journalists to reflect on and discuss the kinds of stories the Bhutanese media need to tell.

The news media in Bhutan have been observed to be urban-centric and negative in their news approach. They are known to focus on what has failed, what does not work, and what is sad.

The journalists cite several reasons for their urban-centric news approach including rural reporting being expensive, media consumers' appetite for bad news, and the Bhutanese newsrooms' tendency to put bad news in the headlines. Observers say the media's focus on the negative breeds cynicism.

Anju Chettri, a media studies lecturer at Sherubtse College, said the media's focus on negative news contents creates mistrust within society. "We are experiencing increasing mistrust



Media students of Shrebutse College discuss in groups a possible Bhutanese approach to journalism

among the authorities," she said, adding that Bhutanese journalism should be unique to Bhutan.

An emerging school of thought in journalism challenges the Bhutanese approach to journalism. It proposes finding stories of solutions, hope and resilience.

Recognising the possibility of a Bhutanese approach to journalism, BCMD last year initiated a Journalism Fellowship that encouraged journalists to travel to rural Bhutan to find stories that represent strength and resilience, and inspire hope.

A number of journalists, who received the fellowship, have travelled to remote corners of the country and reported stories that seldom appeared in the mainstream media. They brought back a wealth of experience in covering rural Bhutan.

The seminar discussed the lessons these reporters have learnt and the challenges they encountered in covering rural stories.

Jigme Wangchuk from Kuensel, a recipient of the journalism fellowship, shared his encounter with the rural Bhutan and the stories that emerged from

his journey into the remote highlands.

Pema Namgay, the Trashigang bureau correspondent of Bhutan Broadcasting Service, also shared his experience of reporting rural stories. He said it is hard for softer and positive stories to grab the headline space and people want the media to report negative and controversial stories.

Kinley Wangmo, a media student, said she had heard different opinions on how the media are failing because they are urban-centric in their news coverage and on how rural voices are missing.

Meanwhile, BCMD on 23 and 24 March conducted a workshop on the role of the media in a democracy at the Institute of Language and Culture Studies in Taktse. Thirty-six members of the institute's media club attended the workshop.

BCMD also conducted a social media conversation for 40 students from Sherubtse College and Sherub Reldri Higher Secondary School in Mongar on 26 March and 28 March respectively. The conversation was part of a series of programmes on educating the Bhutanese youth on social media organised by BCMD.

What does it mean to be a citizen?

I was barely 11 years old when the Third Druk Gylapo visited Sherubtse College and told the students: "You are the wheels and I am the driver." I was too young to understand the meaning of this statement. Now I realise that being a citizen means being the wheels. I am proud to be a citizen of Bhutan where our rulers enable the citizens to partake in the development process.



YONTEN GYELTSHEN, Socio-economist with the Mangdechu Hydropower Project Authority

Being a citizen means respecting one's identity and culture. One should carry out one's duty with loyalty and commitment. As a Bhutanese citizen, I feel proud because I live in a peaceful kingdom and there is no gender inequality in our society. We have a unique culture and a great monarch. Every citizen should abide by the law of the land.



YANGCHEN CHODEN, Shopkeeper

I think just wearing a gho or a kira does not make one a Bhutanese. To be a Bhutanese means to aspire to be part of something unique and wonderful. I believe that every individual in Bhutan is like an individual fibre in a rope. The rope is only as strong as the fibres in it are. I find rising incidents of alcohol and substance dependence worrying. The solution to this will come only when each one of us takes a moral responsibility for the problem.



THINLEY CHODEN, Psychiatric Nurse, Gelephu

ONE DEFINITION

DEMOCRACY

Democracy is a system of government in which all eligible citizens participate equally in their society, usually through elected representatives.

The term originates from the Greek demos (people) Kratos (power or rule), thus giving 'rule of the people'.

Democracy also implies a system of strong civil liberties and social equality.