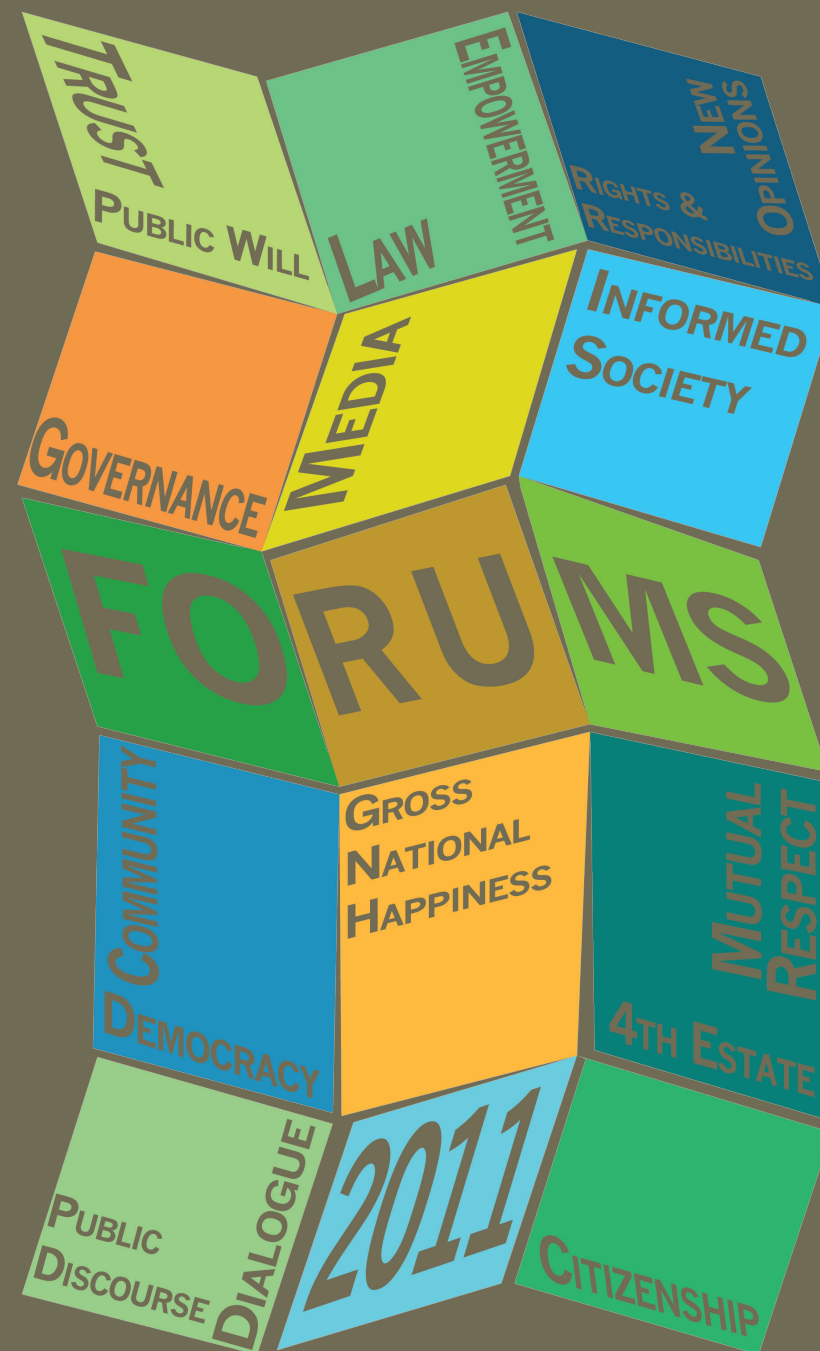


A healthy democracy gains depth through the exchange of diverse views that strengthens civil society and opens up a healthy discussion. The Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) hosts regular forums to provide platforms for discussions on a wide range of issues confronting Bhutan and Bhutanese. This publication is a compilation of presentations and talks from the various forums hosted in 2011. Each forum features speakers with rich and diverse perspectives. They include actors to political figures, academics to media specialists.



Forums 2011



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BHUTAN CENTRE
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY



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BHUTAN CENTRE
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

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Foreword

Democracy is not a spectator sport. Its value as a system of governance rests in the ability of its citizens to stand up from the sidelines and to actively participate in the realisation of a nation's growth and development. Aside from voting, one of the most important ways that citizens can participate is through collective deliberation. People need to come together to reason and talk, to make choices with others about ways to approach difficult issues, and to work towards creating sound public judgment.

Through its discussion forums, The Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) provides opportunities for this process of collective deliberation to take place. Each forum features speakers with rich and diverse perspectives, ranging from famous actresses to prominent politicians. These speakers share their views on a particular issue with an audience that they then engage through discussion. For a traditionally closed and hierarchical society like Bhutan's, these discussions can be lively, stimulating, and even healing for participants unaccustomed to this open style of communication.

During this past year, a number of critical issues were covered: DASHO Neten Zangmo, Chair person of Anti- Corruption Commission of Bhutan discussed the importance of taking on our "natural responsibility" to be active citizens; Elizabeth Smith shared advice on how to achieve high quality broadcasting; DASHO Kinley Dorji encouraged Gewog Administration Officers to use information for the public good; Dr. Jagar Dorji talked to teachers about creating an enabling environment for open discussion; Tshokey Tshomo drew distinctions between what constitutes a celebrity and a true hero; Yangku Tshering Sherpa emphasised the role of education in fostering democracy; and Sonam Kinga outlined the challenges to the health of Bhutan's democracy.

For the benefit of the general public, BCMD has gathered and collected these speeches into the publication that you have before you. While there may be a physical limit to the number of participants we can accommodate during the forums themselves, there is no limit to the number of people who can participate by deliberating on these key issues that matter to Bhutanese society. By making these speeches widely available, we hope that readers will avail themselves of the same opportunity that forum participants had. Please think on the issues discussed within these pages and share them with others.

Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy.

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Media Nomads

Dasho Neten Zangmo speaking at the closing of 3rd Media
Nomads' workshop

After seeing all your films and your wonderful presentations, I wonder whether it will be irrelevant for me to say anything.

In fact these presentations gave me a great deal of hope and confidence in our youth. We keep saying, "Youth are the future of Bhutan, they are our future leaders" but this is lip services, and are clichéd statements that we often make.

But being here today I felt from deep down within me the sense of hopefulness and confidence in our youth. I'm not here as an expert, or here as a political scientist or as the Anti Corruption Commissioner. I am here as a grandmother and a citizen.

Actually I did not want to talk about corruption today. In fact my family and friends sometimes ridicule me for my work. But if you just don't care then who will? There is this deep sense of cynicism and apathy. We just know how to criticise but have not thought about the solutions. This is very irresponsible in my view.

So, I thought I would share some thoughts about this with you, not just because you are the future leaders but because you are also "reform workers". You can reform us. You can reform the government, you can reform the decision making process as advocates. You can reform yourselves. These are very important things. Actually, I am a cynic myself but I try consciously to not be like that. I have to be a responsible citizen as well. I can't afford to just be cynical.

Let's please all move away from this deep sense of apathy and resignation, the sense that nothing can be done and that everyone should be blamed except us.

Recently during the National Day Ceremony, His Majesty the King spoke about Education. He asked whether the education that our youth are receiving are in tune with the needs of the nation and whether, once educated, our children can hope to find employment and realise their full potential. His Majesty's second concern was self-reliance. He asked how we can achieve a measure of self-reliance that will make our growth sustainable, how we can overcome our great dependence on imports.

Self-reliance has been our goal since the first day of national planning. Where are we today? So dependent! Vegetables, consumables, everything, we buy from India- all chemically grown, using chemical fertilizers. Not understanding the negative impacts of such a reliance on imports, we buy most of our produce on the cheap from Falakata (India). What should we do about it? You, students of Sherubtse, especially the science students, are you helping the farmers grow more vegetables more organically, in a healthier way? I don't know. I'm just asking.

The third concern His Majesty had was corruption. He asked: "Will we meet the challenge to overcome it no matter how difficult it may be?" I am just sharing this, just reminding ourselves if we should be thinking about how can we play that role, how can we again make ourselves useful by engaging in that process?

Democracy, of course, is another important area. His Majesty's concern is that we now have very good people in the parliament but is there any guarantee the the best and the brightest will leave their careers and join politics? If you ask me, I don't know. So how are we going to address these concerns as youths? Maybe we have to begin by removing our sense of apathy, the resignation that we can't do anything, this sense of total hopelessness. We have to contribute!

In the end it comes down to the individual as well as the community. It's about me and my family, it's about me and my community, it's about me and my Dzongkhag, it's about me and my Nation. It's about that passion, that concern that knowing fully what happens to my country impacts upon me directly. It's about the sense of

leadership, confidence and that responsibility we have for shaping the success of our society.

So, in a way, this is about civics in practice. Let's look at what's happening around Thimphu. Look at the complaints about the trash. When we go to the chorten for our religious circumambulations, we will see discarded Maggi plastic wrappers on the ground. Do we ever lift a finger to put that Maggie packet in the dustbin? If we don't take individual actions like these how can we ever hope to better our society?

I will borrow another quotation from His Majesty's National Day address. He talked about citizenship.

I quote:

"There is a higher responsibility not written in any legal document, RCSC rules, not binding us but instead enshrined in humanity and history and natural responsibility and duty that we must all shoulder equally, irrespective of who we are, whether you are a parliamentarian or civil society representative or youth or person like me. The paramount importance to the strength of our nation is the ability of people to come together as one united family, a community in which interaction is marked by trust, understanding and cooperation."

So, finally what he says in short is, if we must uphold values such as unity, harmony, integrity, justice, trust and peace. If you respect that they are of great importance then it will be reflected in a strong civil society. A strong civil society is a fundamental pillar of democracy and when you talk about civil society, I don't think he necessarily meant organised, formal, institution of civil society but citizens at large.

And finally, yesterday I was reading this "India Perspective" magazine and there was the cover which says, celebrating the lives of individuals for shaping the nation's future and I was flipping the pages. A 29-year old graduate from India. He was an Aeronautical engineer, he worked for US Air force but he comes back to India.

He was born in America, educated in America and highly qualified but he comes back to India. Of course he had that dream, that you see the earth, you see the universe from that point, it is magnificent, but you have to come back to the earth.

He in fact comes back to India for some programme but his dream becomes to reconnect with not to the people and he started this programme called the green digital, in which he use this simple camera, just to connect farmers and provide information to the farmers.

There is another lady graduate from Punjab. She has a very lucrative job, she leaves that job. She becomes a Sarpanj, I guess Sarpanj is a Gup, is it? May be equivalent to gup. She becomes a Sarpanj, wow! And of course she says that Sarpanj is not a remunerated career path, it doesn't pay her much but she wants to build a community and they said wow!, what inspiring stories, this is about youth making a difference in the lives of the people and in making a difference in the lives of the people they are making a difference in their own lives. So, no apathy, no sense of resignation.

Do you care? We care and if we care, we shall dare. Me and my family, me and my community, me and my Dzungkhag, me and my Nation, in civics and practice. You cannot be productive if you don't have that deep sense of responsibility and I think that is important.

Thank you very much, I have talked too much. Jibber Jabber and one person also mentioned about sensitivity. Let's not worry about sensitivity but I think it's good to be mindful about sensitivity and being skillful and wise and how you address those issues.

For example, we have some complaints coming to our office and then these people are facing reprisals from their agencies. We have their complaints and now I am telling these people that we must fight the system; the arrogance of the government must stop. We must fight the system but, of course some of us might have to be sacrificial lambs and we must bring about change in the behaviour.

If you only shy away and worry about the reprisals being, I don't know, hurting this minister or hurting those agencies and you have to work with the government and you are not going to get that work because you have complained. We are going to become worse and worse. We care and we dare!

Dasbo Neten Zangmo is the Chairperson of Anti-Corruption Commission of Bhutan

The Future of Broadcasting in Bhutan

Elizabeth Smith speaking at the Forum,
“What should be the future of broadcasting in Bhutan?”

Bhutan may have a small population, but already in my brief visit I have realised that it is an ambitious and innovative one.

What may be good enough for the rest of the world is not necessarily good enough for Bhutan. It is felt here that measuring progress by Gross Domestic Product is an inadequate measure so you lead the world in using Gross National Happiness as a measure.

Your state broadcaster BBS is already committed to Public Service Broadcasting. It covers news in an objective way, it reaches virtually all the people, it respects the cultural values of Bhutan, it appeals to all sections of society and it has public funding. The quality of its programmes is good. Innovation is ongoing within BBS to have news staff who cover the same story for Radio, TV and the website. They are also planning innovative and inexpensive computer-based equipment to save costs and extend what can be achieved. The country has already licensed 5 independent radio stations and one college station and is moving towards opening up to a commercial TV broadcaster. And there are people here, both in Government and in civil society, who are thinking hard about how broadcasting in Bhutan should develop.

This is excellent, for there are a lot of options. Some lead to the kind of consumer-based society that Bhutan, I think, does not want to be. Others lead to societies where initiative for broadcasters are constrained by too much state control, sometimes politely disguised as self-censorship. And other roads lead to a high-quality media which is free, responsible, in tune with Bhutanese culture and values, and makes a positive contribution both to democratic development, to prosperity and to greater national happiness.

In my time in the BBC World Service and with the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association I have visited many countries and examined their broadcasting. Some of them have clearly taken the wrong route and now find themselves with a media they feel subverts the values they want to promote. In many countries of the Caribbean, for example, with populations of a million people or fewer, so many commercial radio and TV stations have been licensed that there is not enough advertising money to support them all. Some go bust and close, but then others get new licences and try to compete. The result is chronic underfunding which leads to very low-quality programming. This means endless phone-ins as programmes and also endless deals with sponsors to support, say, programmes about motoring, in order to promote particular kinds of car, or local garages or tyre shops. Ideally, there should not be sponsorship of individual programmes, because of the dangers of them influencing content. There should be a separate ad department that is totally separate from the programming because the money is with business, business can command a lot of coverage. Local history, children's programming, and civic issues, however, do not come with money attached, so it is much harder to get them covered.

I have also been in countries where there is great sensitivity on the part of the Government when anything critical is covered. At one point I organised assistance to Kenya and, during the time President Moi was in power, I sent a consultant to work with them on fair election coverage. After a number of visits, the consultant got all the political parties to agree on a formula for the time allocated to the different parties, based on the current number of MPs from each party in Parliament at that time. This was formally signed up to by everyone concerned – the parties, the electoral commission, and the broadcasters. When the election came, the agreement was adhered to for the first week, and opposition figures appeared on air, in proportion to the formula. Then, I understand, President Moi asked who were these opposition politicians who kept appearing and why were they on radio and TV? The agreement was explained, but with a flip of the fly-whisk, it was gone. So Moi won

that election – but he lost the following one.

In many parts of Africa, the state broadcaster feels an obligation to ensure the return of the Government at elections and also to cover the Government's activities favourably all year round. This is defended as Nation Building. It has the sad effect that it is almost impossible for any inefficiency, wrong decisions or corruption to be examined or exposed. Now the possibility that such failures will be exposed is actually more important than the exposure itself. Just as broadcasters self-censor when they are frightened of what the government might do to them, Government officials hold back before taking part in wrong doing primarily from the fear that they might be exposed. For example, after the current case, a lot of civil servants here in Bhutan will be redoubling their efforts to see that no public money is used to support a maid. This is where, along with fair coverage, the broadcaster makes a major contribution to the quality of governance and to an effective democracy.

I know that Bhutan is seriously committed to good government and to conflict resolution and to increasing prosperity for its people. The people of Bhutan deserve the best broadcasting that the country can afford. This cannot mean all that is offered in India or Europe or the USA, in the way of 24/7 News, and endless specialist channels. TV is very expensive. There is just not the money here to support a lot of local TV channels. It is to do with the size of the financial base. The USA can afford channels devoted to health, to pets, or business and finance, but not many countries can.

The future for broadcasting in Bhutan should be similar to your policy over tourism: to go for quality not for volume. The whole world of shopping channels, quiz shows for big rewards, and endless celebrity chat is not for Bhutan. Bhutan has already got so much of its broadcasting policy right. In the years ahead it will have to focus on defending, preserving and developing the essentials, and on avoiding the worst excesses of consumer TV. To my mind, these include:

- Reinforcing your commitment to the principles of full

Public Service Broadcasting, and enshrining these in legislation. After all, not all successor governments may be as enlightened as the present one. The time to act is now, while opinion is favourable.

- Introducing stable funding for BBS, say for 3 years, so that efficient plans can be made for a lean and well-planned organisation, able to operate strategically.
- Encouraging good governance within BBS by releasing it from detailed Government financial control, but at the same time demanding full accountability and that it meets targets agreed with Government.
- Ensuring a good focus on reaching the majority of the population, i.e. in the rural areas. For many years yet, this is likely to be by radio, so radio deserves a fair share of BBS resources.
- Aiming for BBS to help the population into the knowledge economy.
- Nurturing and supporting a varied and vibrant commercial sector. This should not be too large, however, or there will not be enough money to support quality broadcasting within the commercial sector. And the stations licensed should be chosen on the basis of both their competence, financial strength and their formats, so that they all set out to serve different sectors.
- Examining the case for requiring a certain amount of public service content from each commercial broadcaster. It can be a condition of the license. This has been done successfully in the UK, for example. And consideration could be given to funds for such activities, to be bid for by any broadcasters. This has been tried in both New Zealand, through NZ On Air, and Singapore through the Media Development Authority. There is no reason why Bhutan should not help all its broadcasters with extra funds for

special PSB programming.

- Supporting the growth of a small but high quality independent sector, perhaps by requiring all broadcasters to commission say, 2% of their output from independents.

With modest but sound ambitions of this kind, Bhutan could achieve some of the highest quality broadcasting in its region, and even in the world, taking into account its size. Just as you have preserved your distinctive architecture, with your best new buildings also in this style, and your elegant national dress, and protected your country from the ravages of mass tourism, so you can protect and support your broadcasting. In this way, your cultural values can shine through in all your programming, both state-funded and commercial. I admire your achievements and I look forward to even more in the years ahead.

Elizabeth Smith was formerly Secretary General of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, UK

The Idea of Governance, Government and Democracy

Dasho Kinley Dorji speaking at the opening of Media Sensitisation Workshop for GAOs (Gewog Administrative Officers)

When we talk about governance it means, in essence, the functioning of human society, how people should live together as a family, as a society, as the population of a country. So that is the perspective that I would like to take for my brief talk with you.

Going back in history, the concept of governance, and the role of government in the governance of society, is not new. It existed as long as human beings existed. A long time ago societies were, in fact, governed by “gods” and “deities”, represented by spiritual leaders like priests, monks, lamas, mullahs. They were the figures that ruled and their laws were contained in their holy books. The Christians had the bible, the Muslims had the koran, Buddhists had the kanjur and tenjur, the Hindus had their scriptures and so on.

That changed over time. Gods, symbolically, over the centuries, handed over the reigns to kings. Most societies – western or eastern - had their kings. The ancient Buddhist texts, for example, conveyed the premise that if you leave human beings to themselves they will destroy each other and consume the planet. So, therefore, you needed a leader to rule over them. That leader became the king. Then the kings handed over their rule or power, authority or governance to the people. No one did that better than Bhutan, in my view - the transition from the kings to the people. Because of the wisdom of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, in 2008, we have democracy. This is the context I would like to think about. What actually happened when we talk about democracy in Bhutan is that we adopted an accepted international system - this was in the Westminster style of government that comprises the three branches: the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. And then we have the constitutional posts, the media, and civil society taking part in overall governance.

Ultimately it is the people who must now govern themselves.

In Bhutan we say we are trying to be unique, we are trying to evolve our own form of democracy. That could refer to, in my interpretation, GNH, a profound philosophy that most of us have not fully understood and needs to be debated in more depth. But GNH has set certain priorities, one of the pillars of GNH being good governance. GNH provides a perspective on democracy and this is good because when we talk about democracy, especially in many countries in South Asia and in many developing countries, people think of elections. They think they have achieved democracy by holding elections. And I think that is why democracies are failing. I think we need to understand that election is not democracy. Elections are the beginning, then comes the real task of nurturing democracy, a democratic culture, and democratic values. I think that is the concept with which we need to view our democracy in Bhutan. Since you all are GAOs, I am thinking of how I should put all this in your context, in the context of the responsibility of GAOs in the overall governance of the country. If I were a GAO how would I understand my responsibility in this perspective, in this political transition?

I would like to go back to the process of Bhutan's development in the mid-1970s and 1980s when I worked as a reporter, reporting on what was happening. We did not use the word democracy because we were a Monarchy with His Majesty the King as the head of state and head of the government. His Majesty himself started discussions on the concept of decentralisation. The King ruled traditionally from the royal court and then, with modernisation, the government was formed. His Majesty, instead of sitting in the Palace, attended by some advisors, moved his office in the Dzong and we had various ministries but reporting to the King. His Majesty the Fourth King started talking about decentralisation which became a very popular development terminology and concept even in the international development context, like the UN system. He talked about decentralisation and, in our context, it meant devolving power from the central government, that means from the

ministry to the dzongkhags headed by the dzongdas and then, of course, the GAOs. Through this evolution we have a DYT and a GYT which has now become, through the process of democratisation, local government. But I would also like to share with you that, in many ways, here in Bhutan, the decentralisation had its ups and downs because there were no end of complaints among the civil servants. Every one complained that people in the centre were getting all the facilities, all the opportunities, all the promotions and training. We know that it was largely true so I would say that, if I were a GAO today, I would see my responsibility in the context of democratisation.

Making democracy work at the village level, at the gewog level, at the dzongkhag level, where it really needs to work, now, with our elected leaders. My view is that people sitting in Thimphu don't think enough about what they should do in the districts, the gewog, the village. Authority is devolved really to the dzongkhag and gewog levels. And, with the GAO given multiple responsibilities, I think you are in a central position. Now we need new thinking. We have always had the traditional figures of leadership, like the gups. Now we have the elected local governments.

In Bhutan we've always viewed rural areas as kind of uneducated, rustic communities and Thimphu residents as being more sophisticated, driving big cars, living trendy lives. Unfortunately this is all partly true. But what we really need to understand now is that democracy will never work if power is not devolved to the local governments and the GAO is at the centre of this. You need to understand both sides, you need to understand the Thimphu thinking, your colleagues in central government, and also the thinking of the local leadership. Remember that parts of Bhutan had actually evolved their own traditions of democracy, including herders who had to divide and share pastoral lands.

GAOS need to see your responsibility and position in the context of what is happening today and here I would also mention the evolution of information and services through ICT. Most of you

must have heard of the community centres that are being established in all the gewogs. There are 205 gewogs and there will be more than 140 ICT-services.

The community center is somewhat misunderstood even at the highest government levels of government. Some people used to call this a one-stop shop, community information centre. We are promoting the concept of a community centre deliberately because, in the past, what was happening was that different ministry and agencies were providing services to the people in isolation – they were not coordinated. For example, the Agriculture Ministry established the RNR centre somewhere, Bhutan Post established post offices, the Education Ministry established community schools, the Health Ministry had the BHUs and they all functioned separately. We thought that these services had to come together. What was happening was, exacerbated by rural urban migration, the local community was breaking down and we noticed this all over even in the suburbs of Thimphu. We felt government to citizen services must bring people together.

The local government, districts, gewogs should not be isolated communities any longer. Our fiber optic network are reaching the dzongkhags and gewogs will enable you to be constantly in touch. In fact when we first connected the districts by telephone the dzongdas thought “now we’ll have no more peace, the minister or secretary can call us any time.” Someone said this as a joke but it was actually more than a joke.

Openness and media transparency. How does that work? Put that into the perspective of what we’re talking about, the broader picture, thinking about accountability, transparency etc. We use many terminologies - freedom of expression, democratic discourse. What does all that mean? Sharing information. And one thing that I can tell you, with great authority, is that we Bhutanese do not know how to share information. Our Government agencies, including ministries, do not share information. In fact, on the contrary, we are into turf protection. That thinking is quite strong even in gov-

ernment. This is something we need to get over. This is why our services are not as effective as they should be. We keep talking about these nice democratic concepts but some of us do not understand them ourselves.

To do that, some systems have been established around the world, particularly in more industrialised countries and these are things like laws, rules, regulations and systems to share information.

So, now what would be coming in the constitution could be guaranteed Freedom of Media, Freedom of Right to Information which is becoming an Act, the Right to Information and Right to Privacy. Generally, in a democratic environment, information has to be in the public domain. That is the people's right. People's right to freedom of information is also misunderstood. A lot of people think that it's the right given to the media. No – it's given to the people. Media are the tools to make sure that the people have the right to information.

The Bhutanese person is transitioning from being a subject who served the King to a citizen with responsibilities of governance. The end point in governance is the responsibility of a citizen. On democracy and discourse, the media must provide the space for debate and carry the voices of the people to the leadership. In the past the media's role was to convey the government's directives to the people. The big change now really is that voices of the people need to go to government, especially to the political leadership. That is very simplistically the role of the media. In the Westminster model of the democracy, with the three branches, media is referred to as the Fourth Estate - a watchdog on people in power. People, through the media, make sure that those in positions of power do not abuse that position and that people in power serve the people. Media are not just newspapers, radio, TV. We're talking about film, music, social media, books, and oral media. Media is the force that creates a shared consciousness among the people, because if people in different corners of the country - people in Laya, someone in Samtse, Dorokha, Thimphu, Haa – when people listen to the

same stories, jokes, may be the same festivals, watch the same movies, books and television programmes, they pick up the same value system. That's why some of our young people today have a western sense of humor, and western values - because of TV, a very powerful influence. Even in the old days, why did people in different corners come to the same "shared consciousness"? That is because they attended the same festivals, laughed at the same *atsaras*. The media has overcome our rough terrain, especially with ICT bringing media faster and cheaper to the people. In the past these values came from our parents and now all that comes from media.

In the end, we talk about governance, openness, discourse, debate etc... For me it boils down to being able to think. The most important goal should be learning how to think. In some societies and some systems of government you are not encouraged to think. In some societies people were discouraged from thinking too hard and understanding too much. It was better if people were told what to think.

Today's citizen needs to be capable of critical thinking. What is this advertisement aimed at? Or what does this person really mean? Is he correct? What kind of the government and kind of leader do we want. Who would make a good leader, who would serve the people better? What does this person stand for? The generation before us did not do that. They believed everything they saw, read and heard.

Dasho Kinley Dorji is the Secretary of Ministry of Information and Communication, Bhutan

Media, Democracy and the Use of Public Space

Dr. Jagar Dorji speaking at the Media, Democracy and Civic Participation Seminar at Paro College of Education

This important forum today is special because student teachers, upon graduating from the college, assume an important responsibility for shaping the future of our country.

I have been telling students, who aspire to become elected leaders in future, that their time in school is an opportunity to prepare for their time as future leaders.

Today there are various types of media that provide information, which can easily generate debate, discussions, reflections and interactions both inside and outside the classrooms. Just as in society in general, educational institutions have such public spaces that may be used as forums for discussion and debate. Such public space is important, but it is equally important is how to use this space qualitatively. This is the area I would like to focus on.

- Information: For the very reason there is plenty of information available to us today, we need to select the information carefully. The quality of debate and discussions depends upon the choice of information and the sources from which they are derived. There is printed information that is not very different from rumours which lack authenticity. It is essential to recognise this kind of information. In the aftermath of the September 18 earthquake, a newspaper reported that the earthquake would occur again and with higher magnitude. Without their realising, this piece of information created some panic among the people, leading many to sleep outside their homes.
- Bhutan is geopolitically located in a precarious position. Our

neighbours are enormous in size, economy and population and the more we understand this situation, the more we will be able to understand why we must be aware of what we discuss in open forums. Open debates, while dealing with information that is critical in some aspects, can also cause damage without intending to do so. Under your guidance, school level forums are good opportunities to train our youth in understanding such implications.

- The qualitative use of public space is not just relevant to the government and institutions but also with regard to media versus media, individuals versus individuals, youth versus youth, adults versus adults and so on, on issues that concern everyone. An issue which at first seems unambiguous may turn out to be controversial after all.
- Use of medium of communication is important in civic participation. A majority of our people are illiterate. One has to be able to express oneself clearly in a language that the audience can understand. The choice of a medium of communication, other than that which everyone can understand, may turn out to be onself counter-productive. Sometimes we love to express ourselves in English to the utter disappointment of general Bhutanese audiences. At other times we jump freely from one language to another (often English and Dzongkha) which does not help the majority at all.
- Beside the selection of language, it is also important to note our skills in articulation. Skills in articulation are crucial to such debates. You have the best of intentions, but express it in badly structured language and your ideas can be grossly misunderstood. Training in communication skills, both in writing and speech, should be a must in all schools.

- The lack of qualitative use of public space and lack of participation in public forums tend to encourage people to obstruct productive works by organising movements, protests, pickets and unrest. Such activities are only food for anxiety at best and hamper progress and human relationships.

In Bhutan, we believe that a person must have three qualities: Views, Contemplation and Action. You may not take action without first examining your point of view carefully. Contemplation on the view implies that public participation on a proposal, and the knowledge that has generated such a proposal, need to be debated at large. In a democratic process this is very important.

Since you are going to become teachers, your role in creating an enabling environment in a public space is most critical to our youth. This will enrich their knowledge and confidence in their actions as responsible citizens.

A function of the public space, in my view, is to contribute to public debate on issues of national interests, issues pertaining to general welfare, efficacy of service delivery and issues regarding the impact of certain policies.

In our countryside, many people want to share their views on issues that are important to their life. They do not know where and to whom talk to. A qualitatively used public space will help sort many of the problems at the local level rather than finding a channel to reach the top from where it often returns to be decided at local levels anyway.

Can you see your role as a teacher in improving the qualitative use of public space?

Dr. Jagkar Dorji is member of the National Council of Bhutan

Media Literacy, Celebrities and Heroes

Tshokey Tshomo speaking at the closing of the 2nd Media
Nomads Workshop

I would like to start with how my life was before we had television in Bhutan.

When I was a child, television had not yet come to Bhutan and I remember I was more creative. I would spend more time with my family. Dinners were eaten together and there was more communication among families. We didn't have gang violence among the youth. I studied at Lungtenzampa Middle Secondary School, which was a quiet and normal school, and now I hear that in many schools in Thimphu and all over Bhutan teachers often feel threatened by their students.

So how have we come to this stage, you wonder?" In any event, it is not the responsibility of a group of people nor is it the government's problem. I think we all (Nga che ra ga ra), as individuals, need to understand what is happening to ourselves.

Given the gravity of the situation, there is no better time to educate our youth, to educate our children and our parents about Media Literacy.

Education is a very different thing from Media Literacy because I know of people who are educated but are not media literate. So as we modernise, the influences of the outside world are coming in and we cannot stop that, but you have a choice. You as an individual have a choice over what you watch, what you listen to and the program that you want to watch. Take : I hardly watch television. When I watch television, I only watch educational programming like National Geographic, TLC and the BBC. I don't even know what commercial Hollywood and Bollywood are releasing because

I have no time for such things and I choose not to. I'd rather read a book, I'd rather interact with people, I'd rather be outside, going for walk. So these are the little things that we are forgetting.

Now Bhutan today is very different from the Bhutan of our parents. So where are we going wrong? I ask this because I walk the streets of Thimphu and I don't feel safe. Firstly, I don't feel safe because of all the gang violence and drug abuse and secondly, because I am a public figure. I have had many incidents where young people who are intoxicated have walked up to me and accosted me. Do I scream and scold that person? Do I walk away? Most of the time I speak very politely and walk away. This is what is happening on our streets in Bhutan. Who is affected? Do you think the highly educated families are affected? What range of people do you think are affected by this?

I believe there are many children in Bhutan who don't understand what the media can do. As a public figure the media can lift you up one minute and the next minute it can drop you down hard. You know celebrities become what the media dictates their life is. If the media portrays me as a good person my audience will think I'm a good person. If the media portrays me as a bad person, I'm seen as bad. I lose my fan base.

In Bhutan right now, many of our youths are very influenced by the Korean movies, the Bollywood movies and of course now we have Dzongkha movies. I would like to talk to you about my film titled "Shhh...Galuya Ma Lap" (Shh...Don't Tell Anyone). You would have enjoyed it but I do not enjoy the movie because there are so many commercial angles in it. If I was given the hand in writing the script and if I didn't have to make money I would have changed the story. It would have been a beautiful story about a woman who gets Aids and is stigmatised by society, but then we had to put in scenes of humour, jokes, and fight scenes, none of which are real which you the audience always enjoy. So then, I think, sometimes that's where we are going wrong.

In another movie of mine, "Sharchopa Zamin", for which I wrote

the story, I purposely stereotyped the character because she is the opposite of what most of you aspire to be today. I wanted you to understand that right now, your generation, all you want to do is to be cool Koreans. To have your hair bleached yellow and to perm it all the time, to watch a Korean TV series and to emulate those Korean actors in the series.

So in “Sharchopa Zamin” I played the opposite role of the type of person you don’t want to be. You don’t want to tie your hair like that of the character I played, you don’t want to have a terrible Sharchop accent like her. You want to be cool, you want be rich, you want to have the money, you want to dress up, you want everything on the outside and you don’t look inside; that’s what our problem is. We need to go inside. Beauty is inside, never on the outside.

Okay, now something about advertising. Do you know that advertising has a formula? If I’m in advertising, I will study this group, this age, the girls here. I’ll know your psychology, I’ll know what you like, what age you are, what background you come from, what will work on you and make you want to buy when I launch my product.

Take, for instance, the Indian, imported, skin-whitening creams that, are very popular in Bhutan today: Fair and Lovely, Fair and Handsome. I see many students using it. Do you think anybody becomes fairer by using that cream? No, it does not work, but what happens is technology makes it work when the commercials and advertisements for it are shot. We have lighting systems that make me look different on screen. We have cameras with which we can change the shooting modes to make the subject look better and fairer. We have editing, and then of course we have Photoshop. I have a pimple today, and tomorrow it’s gone in the pictures. In many of my pictures I hardly see my pimples. Where are my pimples? Because I’m human, I have pimples, but I don’t see pimples in my pictures. Photoshopped and gone, and now I have the perfect image! So “Fair and Lovely” does the same thing. They Photoshop Priyanka Chopra and Sharukh Khan and they make them many times fairer by changing the picture. So we have to understand

that the technology can do many things and that nothing is real when we watch commercial TV. We have to know the difference. I just want you to take the time to question what you see and what you hear. So we all know the psychology behind movie making. Moviemakers are always tricking you but you need to be able to differentiate and know “I’m being tricked here”.

Now, about stereotyping. I want to talk about rap and hip-hop music. I know that hip-hop and rap is very popular here. Who is being stereotyped in this kind of music? Women are seen as nothing but objects, to dance around the cars in there nice dresses. So you see there is lot of stereotyping, especially of women, in songs as well as in movies.

I also want to talk about Facebook and social media. Some Bhutanese users are so young on Facebook that I have called their parents. I’m sorry to intrude, but their children who are 10 or 11 put themselves up as 16 or 17 to enter and use the website. Is this right? Of course not. Facebook and similar websites are not for children, and now with no guidance at home, our children are all going to websites and social networking sites and you have to be careful with the Internet. Nowadays there’s also the phenomenon of Internet dating, where you chat. I can pretend be the biggest billionaire behind that computer but that’s weakness. Strength is being who you are, so you see, you girls need to be careful of Internet dating. Sometimes it can lead to rape and molestation and worse.

We cannot stop the channels that come on TV. Commercial producers will not stop making movies to make more money. Korean pop singers won’t stop dressing the way they dress. No one is going to stop doing any of these things, so you need to be able to turn off the switch yourself. You need to develop a critical thinking mind to see what is being done to you.

Now, finally I want to speak a little bit about the difference between a celebrity and a hero. There is often the misunderstanding that it is the same thing. However, heroes for me are inspiring people like

Mother Teresa. For me a hero is someone who expresses dignity through his or her work, like the street sweeper who gets up in the morning and cleans the streets so that you can walk amid clean and healthy surroundings when you get up for a walk in the morning. It's about the qualities of courage as well, such as those shown by the many international figures who have fought for political, religious and spiritual freedom.

Celebrity is very different. If a guy who seems to be “cool” walks in, we say in Bhutanese: “Paa hero”. But in truth a celebrity is not a real hero but simply an entertainer, and not necessarily a good person. A hero, on the other hand, is someone who is celebrated for his or her genuinely good qualities of dignity, compassion and courage.

Tshokey Tshomo Karchung is an actress, Bhutan

Educating Our Youth for Democracy

Dasho Yangku Tshering Sherpa speaking at the opening of “Youth Inclusion in a Democracy”- a panel discussion on World Democracy Day

The theme for this year’s commemoration of International Democracy Day is “Youth Inclusion and Democracy”, reflecting the need to reinforce the faith of all young people in democracy and human rights. It is significant especially for Bhutan, since about 30.6 percent of the total population is below 14 years of age and only 4.7 percent above the age of 65.

In the first ever general elections held in 2008, youths within the age group of 18-24 years made up only 20 % of the total voters’ turnout. Therefore, such initiatives are even more imperative to a young democracy such as ours. We need to heighten and promote the civic engagement of the younger generation of Bhutanese people.

One of the weaknesses of our conventional education system is the separation of school studies from the realities on the ground. Education in our schools focus on academics and do not prepare our children to get more in touch with real life and the real world. The transition to democracy is one such example. Are our children learning about democracy only through textbooks? What are we doing to show them that they can experience democracy in daily life, such as when providing feedback to the school, or when voting for a class monitor?

It is important to engage students, so they have a direct experience of democracy as an integral part of their schooling. Students are most likely to understand and value democracy and develop the skills required for effective democratic citizenship if they have the first-hand experience of participating in democratic self-gov-

ernance. Democratic education is a powerful stimulus for full human development, including cognitive, social, political, and moral development. It is time to educate our children about democracy and to provide more avenues for youths to have a say in the way the rules are decided and implemented, in the way elections are held for school leadership, and in determining priorities for school management.

Active citizenship for young people implies full and complete participation in society, as well as the commitment and the ability to practice that citizenship. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise and support the various ways in which young people participate in their own immediate environments such as their schools and institutions.

There are several obstacles to youth participation in Bhutan's democracy. They include a lack of knowledge and understanding of democratic processes. Many youths also have difficulties expressing issues of concern. All these impede people's ability to participate and to understand their role as citizens of Bhutan. We need to identify and overcome obstacles which prevent specific groups of young people from participating. We also need to build more mechanisms and opportunity for youths and encourage them to participate in the decision-making processes.

Youth voices are excluded from decision-making processes in social development, from the grass-roots to the national level because the elders often think that the young lack experience or are not educated enough to deal with such issues. But, on the contrary, I believe that youths today are well-educated and are capable of contributing to social development. Youth voices need to be integrated into as many development planning processes as possible.

Mahatma Gandhi, one of the great luminaries of our civilization, once said: "The greatest lessons in life, if we would but stoop and humble ourselves, we would learn not from grown-up learned men, but from the so-called ignorant children."

Lastly, I would like to reiterate that our youths are still largely seen as disengaged from organised efforts to lead and represent their communities. I hope that events such as Youth Inclusion and Democracy will help to develop stronger bonds between young people, citizenship and democracy. I would like to urge my young and bright young fellow citizens gathered here today to make use of this opportunity and ask very difficult questions to clarify your doubts and to share your concerns. Please share your views to help deepen our democracy.

Dasho Yangku Tshering Sherpa is the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Bhutan

Challenges to Democracy in Bhutan

Dasho Sonam Kinga speaking at the opening of the 3rd Media
Nomads Workshop

We have all been introduced to the idea that democracy in Bhutan is a “gift from the throne”. But what is it that is really the gift? His Majesty the Fourth King has said time and again that the “destiny of Bhutan lies in the hands of the Bhutanese people” – a statement that still resonates with us today. At first, we thought it was just rhetoric; its meaning never really sank deep into us.

How do I think of democracy as a gift? I see it as a responsibility of self-governance: That we, collectively as a society, take responsibility for being in charge of the everyday life of our future, by organising ourselves into a mode that’s called democratic governance.

Now, challenges to democracy is actually a broad subject. Instead, we need to talk about challenges to democratic transition and democratic consolidation. I think, in our country today, many of us assume, or rather take comfort in the idea, that democratic transition is already complete. We have had elections, parliament has been formed, local government elections are more or less over, and institutions such as the Election Commission and bureaucracies are in place. Basically, people assume, or imagine, that we have completed the transition.

I would, however, caution you against such a thought. We are still very much in the transitional phase, and that itself poses certain challenges.

Now, democracy was a gift from His Majesty the King, and that gift came in the form of the Constitution. And because the Constitution outlines a certain set of procedures for how a

government would be elected, we assume that those procedures establish how a government is put in place.

But let me take you back to 2008, for example, when we had just two political parties, and we did not hold the primary round, as foreseen by the Constitution, but went directly into the general round of elections. There were questions asked -- such as, despite the fact that there were only two political parties, should a primary round not be held? Should not a primary round be the mechanism of endowing legitimacy to political parties? Such questions have not yet been answered, nor have they been addressed in a satisfactory manner.

There are questions about Bhutan's transition that we need to ask ourselves, and therefore we cannot take for granted that Bhutan's democratic transition is complete.

The institutions, the parliamentary procedures, and the democratic practices will all have to be tested. The next 5, 10, 15 years will be a crucial period, both for completing Bhutan's transition to, and consolidation of, democracy.

Let's talk about practical examples.

Today, one of the challenges faced in Bhutan's democracy is the need for multiple actors, by which I mean actors in the form of institutions, such as political parties. Back in 2008, we had 3 or 4 political parties in the beginning; there were mergers, there were splits. In the end, we had 2 political parties. And the scenario for 2013 does not look too good at the moment.

One of the biggest challenges for Bhutan's democracy will be within the space in which actors act, which means we have democratic actors play out democratic politics. If we have fewer actors, that narrows our choices, narrows our policy options, and narrows our vision of how democratic Bhutan unfolds in the next few years.

One of the most interesting things that happened in the last election was the response from people articulating in the media against MPs wearing kabneys and patangs. Why did people react that way? I think it's because, as a society, we did not fight for democracy, we did not have a civil war or a movement or demonstrations; we imagined that democracy would bring something else. We imagined that democracy really means bringing in a more egalitarian society.

So there was this expectation that society would become less hierarchical in the way social relations were organised. But the moment we saw our elected representatives wearing kabney and patang, we felt that a sense of hierarchy was being reinforced. And people reacted against the reuse of those traditional symbols of hierarchy. So, the challenge is how do we address traditional symbols and emerging trends and emerging symbols of inequality? Thus, a dissonance emerges between our expectations and what we see in our reality.

As much as we are mindful of traditional symbols of hierarchy and relationships, we also need to be mindful of emerging trends that may lead to greater inequality. The challenge for democracy is to ensure that economic power does not become entrenched in the hands of those who have political power.

Policies relating to the private sector, Foreign Direct Investment, and so forth, cannot result in the creation of an economic structure whereby wealth becomes concentrated in the hands of the very few, and therefore creates new levels of inequality in society. These are things we need to be mindful of as we continue our transition.

There is another challenge. Monarchy has become constitutional, democracy has been introduced, institutions and procedures have changed but for genuine change to take place.

Democracy came as a sacrifice from the King. Now those in power, like myself, will have the interest to perpetuate and continue our hold on power. Most representatives would like to seek re-election

in one form or another. Now, I do not think that will be too healthy for our democracy. While our democracy needs participants, at the same time we also need to demonstrate that the state cannot be a private property; that the state belongs to the people of Bhutan. Any attack that might contribute to perpetuating some people's continuity of power will not contribute to democracy.

The other thing we need to be mindful of is how elected governments will fulfill the promises they have made in their manifestos and beyond. The tendency to become populist will be very strong. For example, you need to consider our national resources when trying to accomplish all of your targets and promises. The tendency of any government, as they try to accomplish their campaign undertakings, is to mobilise resources both from within and abroad, and therefore end up in a situation where our foreign debt might shoot up. That tendency will undermine the faith we can have for democracy.

One of the greatest challenges will be how people like ourselves trust democracy. Do we think democracy is the best political arrangement through which we can govern our collective life? As long as we build confidence in this system, then the challenge may not be as strong. However, our young democracy must earn that trust, and prove that it is the political arrangement that can deliver not just economic development but social justice as well.

But we do not know if this is something people think about. As long as people do not think of an alternative political arrangement, as long as we agree that democracy is the only game in town, we should be okay. However, it will take time for this to happen. How that confidence is built will depend upon the behaviour, the attitude, and performance of elected leaders.

We also need to agree that as long as we have democracy, we can resolve all of our differences and disputes. We agree that there will be differences and disputes, but such conflicts need to be resolved through democracy, and not by other means. Are we ready to do that? As of now, I am a bit doubtful that this is happening. Our

tendency is to look for alternatives, and that will be a challenge when you think of alternative ways of resolving disputes and mediating conflicts.

How do young people participate in a democracy? Basically, for democracy to be vibrant, we need an active citizenry. Citizens need to be engaged. Why young people? Firstly, if we look at population statistics, we know that young people constitute the largest group in our society. It's not just because of the size of the group, but also because most young people go to schools, and therefore have a high level of education.

How do young people become engaged? There may be "democracy fatigue"; you may choose to distance yourselves and you may choose to be passive, and that, of course, will not bode well for democracy. Young people need to participate. I think we can all agree that democracy is a form of government in which we govern ourselves. How do young people participate in governing themselves, in making decisions for public life, in ensuring that services are delivered?

I think the first step is to understand democracy before we engage with it. Whenever I go to Trashigang to visit my constituents, I always tell them to read Articles 7 and 8 of our Constitution, i.e. our Fundamental Rights and Duties. We young people need to know what our rights are. And whenever your constitutionally granted rights are violated, it will be incumbent upon you to have that right restored.

You also need to uphold your duties. What are your duties as a citizen? One of the fundamental duties is to pay taxes, but you may not be able to do that unless you are earning an income of over Nu 100,000. Without knowing the fundamental basis of democracy, more than what you have learned in your civics textbooks earlier, you cannot act effectively as a citizen.

For young people interested in participating in political life,

the opportunities exist. Political parties are always scouting for interested candidates! But you need to remember that running for political office, or voting, are not the only means for participating in a democracy. I would like to believe that there are other means for young people to engage. Today, one important thing we need in Bhutan is a public intellectual life, a public discourse. This is something we really miss, young people engaging in public discourse on public issues that concern us as citizens.

How do you do that? I think, as I've been encouraging students, young people need to take advantage of the editorial columns and pages of newspapers, by submitting your views, writing your comments, and participating in online forums, while remaining disciplined and responsible. In that way, I believe, you engage. The moment you have a view on an issue, the moment you think that is the way to deal with an issue, and the moment you articulate that in a public forum, that is when you participate.

Most importantly, young people need to be at the forefront of questioning their MPs. You demand accountability, which is key to governance. How do you do that? You look at the campaign platform that your MP released, and check whether they are doing that or not. Villages do ask for accountability in the form of progress reports, but the level at which young people engage can be deeper. You need to really demand accountability from those who govern your life, especially the MPs; about their campaign promises, their views on various issues, and why they voted the way they did. The moment an MP refuses to cooperate, they should know that their position is at stake for the next election.

Dasho Sonam Kinga is the Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Bhutan

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