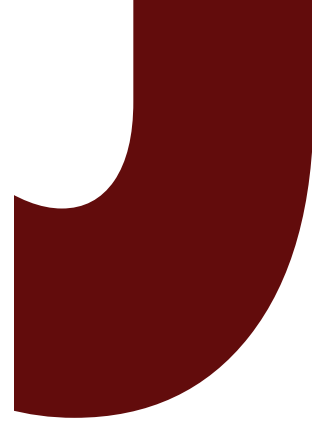


# The Druk Journal

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*An M&E report  
(2015 – July 2021)*

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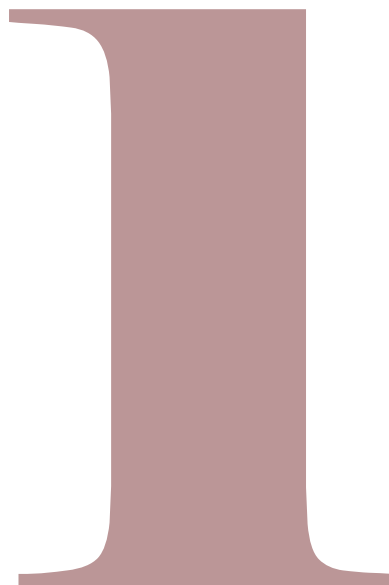
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# Background on The Druk Journal (TDJ)

**T**he Druk Journal, a journal of thoughts and ideas, started publication in 2015 to address a much felt need in an evolving democracy. Bhutan lacked an “intellectual” community that could engage in public discourse on public policy – in social, economic, political, cultural and other issues that society faced, topics that form a normal part of intellectual discourse in other societies. Seminars and discussions that did take place were events led by the government, and largely attended by members of the bureaucracy.



The initial founders of TDJ felt that such a community was lacking partly because the education system did not encourage critical thinking. The education system, begun in the 1960s, focused on basic literacy, and teaching was, and largely remains, limited to rote learning. Moreover, education was and is seen as a means to develop the ability to compete

in an increasingly global market in commercial and technological areas. With many changes in governance and the education system, the development of capacities for critical analysis is largely ignored in practice.

While public debate appeared in the newspapers, the debate often lacked depth and was more personal criticism oriented toward the political arena rather than in an analytic approach to policy and other problems.

At the time of conceptualising The Druk Journal, it was felt that Bhutan lacked a community of critical thinkers engaging in social science research about present reality or projecting different visions for the future of the country from which the people may make their choices. Politics, therefore, was personalised, and ideas had next to no role whatsoever in the process. For example, none of the political parties engaged in the electoral process presented a coherent analysis of the issues facing the country or a set of policies to deal with the issues, much less intellectual arguments to support its claims to popular support. The Journal believes that more needs to be done to have coherent analysis as well as to develop a community capable and open enough to listen to feedback and to deliberate critical

issues. We believe that this condition characterises many very small and intermediate sized states around the world which, for one reason or another, lack a critical mass of intellectuals trained to think critically and creatively about the issues that confront their societies in the present or will confront them in the future.

It was in such a scenario that The Druk Journal was planned to develop a community that would deliberate on issues of national importance. It was decided that BCMD, already established, would publish the journal instead of creating a new organisation.

Today, The Druk Journal is a credible non-partisan publication that also organises conversations aimed at creating serious discourse around policy issues serving Bhutan's national interests.







# Purpose of The Druk Journal

“To expand the national discourse by introducing new ideas and concepts into the Bhutanese conversation.”

The Druk Journal highlights important issues that Bhutan faces, and gets people interested in writing, reading, and thinking about them. Each journal is accompanied by at least one conversation and an additional forum or seminar to discuss the theme and articles published. Writers are invited to speak with a cross section of society.



## 2.1 Objectives of The Druk Journal

The Druk Journal aims to serve the national interest through the following:

**2.1.1** TDJ serves as a vehicle for the development of a community of people who are concerned about national policy and who want to participate in the development

of policy by thinking publicly and through conversation.

**2.1.2** TDJ aims to provide a public space in which ideas about policy can be exchanged.

**2.1.3** To introduce new ideas and concepts into the Bhutanese conversation about policies and issues; looking at issues from every possible constructive point of view.

**2.1.4** To encourage among Bhutanese a greater awareness of the experience of other countries in those areas of political, social, economic and cultural experimentation that are relevant to our own concerns.

To achieve the objectives, The Druk Journal will:

- publish editions on a regular basis and focus each issue on a particular theme.
- maintain a website to contain the complete published editions and provide a means for continued discussion of the issues.
- encourage discussions after each edition so that interested individuals can share open and frank views on policy questions.

## **2.2 The format, target readers, conversations**

Format: To make the discussions and writing more palatable to a largely oral society unused to academic writing, The Druk Journal decided to take an approach that was a mix of academic and journalistic/magazine type writing. This has proven to be effective in getting the articles read, as the study shows. The first edition included pictures that were removed from the second issue onwards because of the difficulty of getting a picture to succinctly illustrate each article.

Primary targeted readers: The primary audience for the Journal are key decision makers, politicians, civil servants, media professionals, educators throughout the educational system, civil society members, students and faculty members of the Royal University of Bhutan, private colleges and other tertiary educational institutions.

Accompanying Conversations: The conversation/forum is an indivisible part of The Druk Journal project. It has, over the years, become a part of that “public space” which so badly needs to be created in a country where government led discussions are not always inclusive nor bring in the diversity in views needed for

democracy to be fully functional. TDJ founders expected that, with time, the forum may grow into a kind of unofficial “think tank,” so that what, in the beginning, will be an active public space in the country, may, in the long run, grow into an independent institution.



# Purpose of this M&E Report

Six and a half years after the launch of The Druk Journal, this monitoring and evaluation report aims to :

- Provide an understanding of the reach, the results, and the early impact of TDJ
- Use the findings to improve on the journal, develop the next phase for TDJ –2022-2024, and other purposes.

## What will we monitor and evaluate?

- readership and circulation/ outreach in print, online, social media
- accessibility – in libraries, in offices, and across sections of society
- impact of the journal, topics, conversations, and seminars
- Analysis of the results and outcomes ( planned and otherwise)

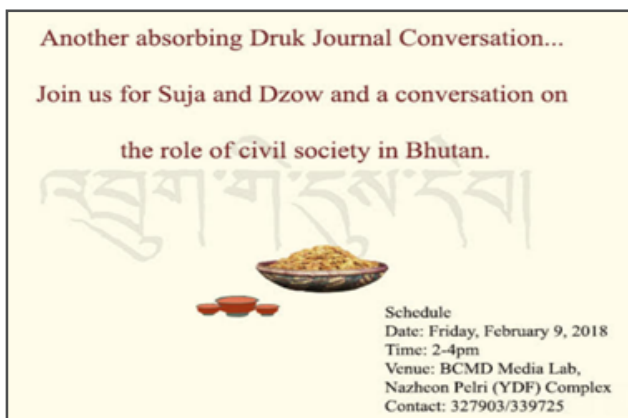


### 3.1 Methodology

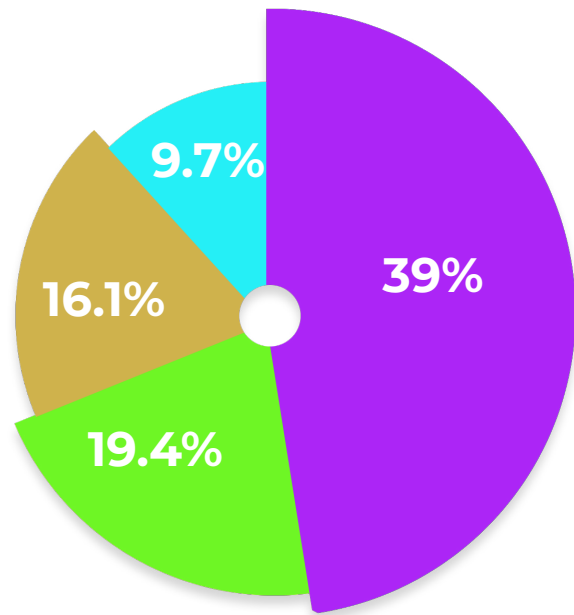
This study uses a mix of report reviews, interviews, and survey questionnaires with writers, conversation participants, and readers. Evidence is also gleaned from past reports and experiences shared by interviewees.

Interviews were conducted with representatives from academia, the press, civil society, youth, the media, and MPs to provide feedback. A list of interviewees is included in Annexe 1. Reviews of relevant reports ( annual reports and websites) were carried out.

A total of 31 surveys were conducted among readers and another dozen surveys among writers. Survey forms and questionnaires are included in Annexe 2.



**Figure 1: Profile of readers**



- Academics and Educators
- Policymakers and Civil Servants
- MPs, students and Researchers
- Private Sector

About 39% of reader-respondents are academics and educators; 19.4% are policymakers and civil servants; MPs, students, researchers comprise 16.1 % of each of the total respondents; and 9.7% are from the private sector. (See details in tables at end of report).









# Updates on TDJ - Outputs



## **Readership and circulation/ reach**

TDJ is in its 7th year of publication with 13 issues produced on a wide ranging selection of themes as of July 2021 (See Table 1 which includes number of hard copies and other details).

**Table 1: TDJ – output details**

Year/ Issue	Title	No. of articles	print run	conversations/ participants	writers	remarks
2015 vol.1 no.1	National Identity	22	1600	1 conversation/ 50 participants	20	
vol.1 no.2	The Bhutanese State and its Institutions	18	1600	1 conversation / 42 participants	20	
	2015 articles	40	3200			
2016 vol.2 no.1	Bhutan and Modernity – responding to change	13	1600	1 conversation /30 participants	15	copies reached 11 colleges
vol. 2 no. 2	Youth Matters	19	1600	2 conversations (paro) = 48 + 35 = 83 participants	11	Copies reaching more colleges
	2016 articles	32	3200			
2017 vol 3 no. 1	Towards a Sustainable Development	17	1600	1 conversation/ 47 participants 2 conversations (CSO retreat + Sherubtse)/233 participants	22	Circulation reached 262 institutions this year
vol 3 no. 2	Civil Society in Bhutan	16	1600		15	
	2017 articles	33	3200	6/233		
2018 vol. 4 no. 1	Democratisation of Bhutan	19	1500 copies	4 conversations /seminar with 770 participants ( 2 at Gaeddu College, and 1 each at Sherubtse and CLCS colleges)	22	- perspectives of political parties' added. Conversations on CS & Democratisation for final year students of media, political science, social science
vol. 4 no. 2	Transforming Bhutan's Economy	19	1600		21	Intellectual input to BEFIT Summit, 2018
	2018 articles	38	3100	4/770		



2019 vol.5 no.1	Educating Bhutan	19	1300	1 conversation /18 participants 1/ at sherubtse college	21	Political parties contributed articles
vol.5 no.2	Tourism in Bhutan	18	1000	1 conversation/ 50 participants	20	1958 views on tourism website as of July 21. Input to TCB's tourism policy review.
2019 articles		37	2300			
2020 vol.6 no.1	Bhutan in the Age of Technology	17	800	3 conversations 495 participants	18	Conversation: 1,427 views on youtube as of July 21, 2021
vol.6 no.2	Urban Bhutan, the Story	15	600	2 conversation/ 85 participants	16	Conversation: On youtube: 777 views as of July 21, 2021
2020 articles		32	1400			
2021 vol.7 no.1	Bhutan after the COVID 19 crisis	16	800	1 conversation /15 participants broadcast on BBS	20	
	sub total:					
Total		228	17,200	1,871 participants in attendance in person	241	

## 4.1 Summary of outputs

### 4.1.1 Publish editions on a regular basis

- 13 editions released twice annually with 17,200 copies printed for distribution

#### Number of articles published and number of themes covered:

 **228**  
articles

 **13**  
editions

 **1764**  
pages

 **253**  
writers

- 228 articles over 13 editions or about 18 articles per issue on average.
- A total of 1764 pages in 13 editions or an average of 135.6 pages per issue.
- A total of 253 writers (186 male, 67 female) include a mix of writers who are mostly Bhutanese with 84 international writers included.

35% of total contributors to TDJ are writers from outside Bhutan.

### Access and distribution

- TDJ distribution has expanded to reach more than 262 institutions.
- Available in public libraries, 15 college and parliament libraries, and posted on the library webpage of the National Assembly of Bhutan. It is also available at the Library of Congress (US).

The hard copy version of the Journal is distributed to high schools and colleges around the country, many of whom lack access to the online version because of the absence of connectivity. Copies are mailed to government offices, constitutional agencies, the Parliament of Bhutan (all MPs), the Judiciary, district municipal offices, political parties, civil society organisations, and media.

### CALL FOR ARTICLES

The fall issue of The Druk Journal will look at aspirations, concerns, expectations and mandate of the Bhutanese youth. This is a pertinent theme that comes at a vital time because Bhutan is currently thinking about the future and the role of its future citizens.

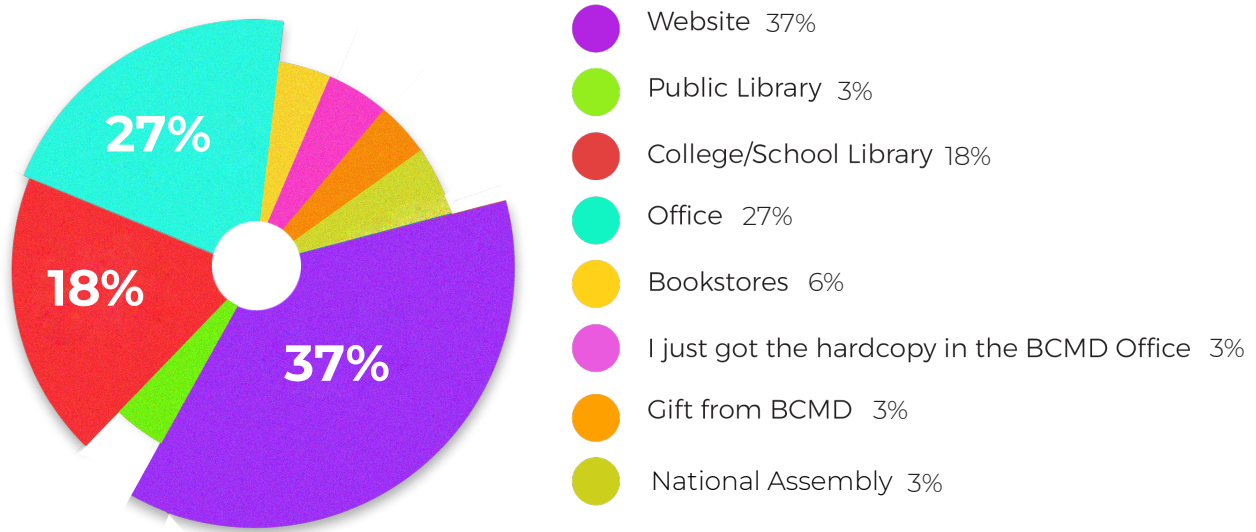
### ARE YOU INTERESTED?

Find the prompt and timeline on:

The reader's survey indicates where they get their copies of TDJ:



**Figure 2: I get copy of TDJ at**



*Most of the users access TDJ copy from the TDJ website (37%), followed by the office (27%) and their college/school library (18%).*

#### 4.1.2 Maintain a website

##### ***Social media presence:***

TDJ’s website was set up in 2015 and revamped at the end of the year. Some numbers were lost from this upgrade of the website but available figures show that the Journal is increasingly being viewed online.

TDJ found that people tended to comment on the more informal Facebook presence. Experience of other journals in Bhutan shows that commenting on journal sites is not a common practice. TDJ could improve on tracking social media visitors more regularly.

**Table 2: Website visitors and access through TDJ’s web presence over the years**

Year	No of Unique Visitors	No of Visits	Hits	remarks
2015	not available	n.a.	n.a.	
2016 (May-Dec)	3,845	6,489	159,485	Missing: 4 months data
2017	41,181	58,026	570,698	
2018 (Jan-May)	16,185	30,186	288,514	Missing: 7 months data
2019 (Sept-Dec)	15,984	30,386	345,370	Missing: 8 months data
2020	51,410	102,836	1,311,847	
2021 (Jan-26 July)	32,251	61,684	904,188	
<b>Total</b>	<b>160,856</b>	<b>289,607</b>	<b>3,580,102</b>	<b>Missing total: 1 year 5 months data</b>

Facebook page: 3,145 followers (as of July 2021)

**Number of articles downloaded/ viewed**

Analytics show a steadily increasing

number of visits to the websites and articles online. TDJ made progress with the number of hits going up by nearly four-fold between 2016 and 2017. The total number of hits on the website increased from 159,485 in

2016 to 570,698 in 2017. The number of unique visitors also grew from 3,845 in 2016 to 41,181 in 2017, to 51,410 in 2020.

There are gaps in the figures for almost 1 year and 5 months. Despite

this, the website registered a total of **160,856 unique visitors with 289,607 visits** as of July 26th 2021. The most accessed issues online include the following:

**Table 3 : Most accessed issues online**

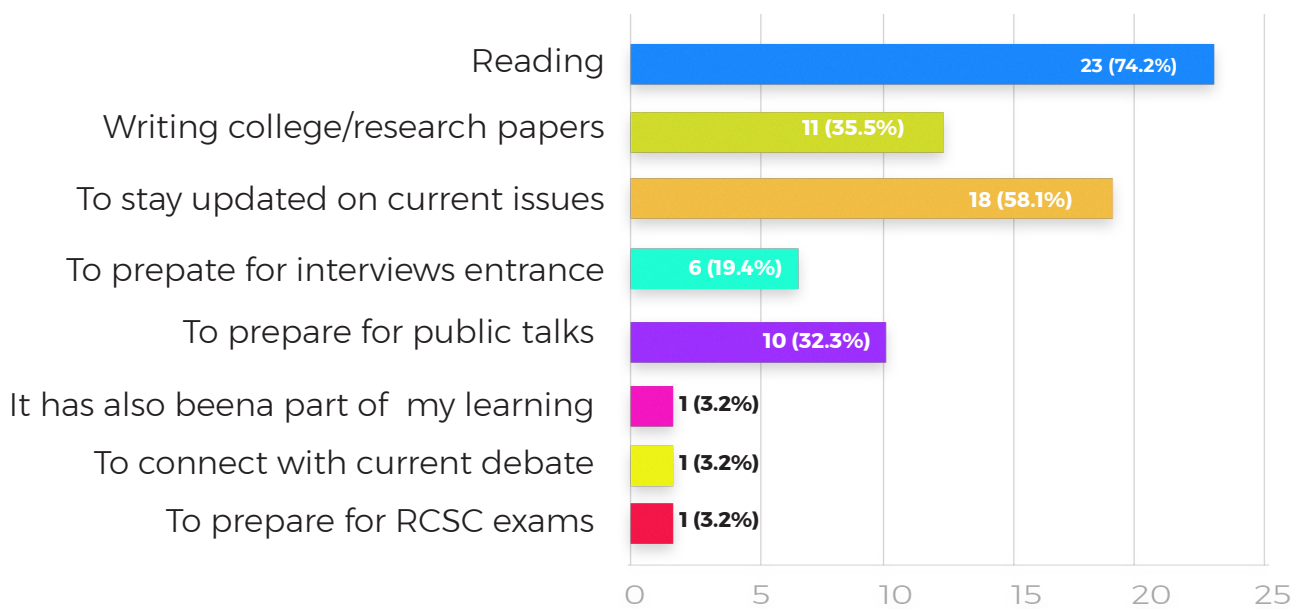
Year	Themes/ Volume no	No. of articles accessed on the website
2015	National Identity , Vol. 1 Issue 1	25,028
2020	Bhutan in the Age of Technology, Vol. 6 No 1	24,735
2017	Towards a Sustainable Bhutan - Vol. 3 Issue 1	20,243
2015	The Bhutanese State and its Institution, Vol 1 Issue 2	17,449
2016	Bhutan and Modernity, Vol 2 Issue 1	13,956
2018	Transforming Bhutan’s Economy, Vol 4 Issue 2	12,236
2019	Tourism in Bhutan	9,128
2019	Education	8,142
2018	Democratisation of Bhutan	7,526
2016	Youth Matters	5,173
2017	Civil Society in Bhutan	4,961

## Citations

At least 52 citations of more than 22 articles have been posted on google scholar. Citations are traced to Harvard University and the University of Birmingham websites. Others are also found in research.edu and academia.edu. Local citations in Bhutanese colleges are not included in the findings as these are hard to trace.

Readers in general read TDJ to better understand current issues, and for research as well as to prepare for presentations (note that 4 out of 10 respondents are educators, and another 2 out of 10 respondents are policy –makers and civil servants).

**Figure 3: Reader’s use of TDJ**



## Number of times recommendations of articles were shared

Records show that 545 articles were shared online from TDJ’s FB page as of August 2021. Writers who share their own articles on their FB pages are not tracked here.

Anecdotal evidence shows that individuals posting articles on their own FB pages can encourage more dissemination.

Overall recommendations and suggestions meant as feedback to relevant agencies are shared in







partners and representatives, citizens, and many from outside the civil service.

3. Writers are invited to participate in these discussions. Conversation participants are also asked to share suggestions and feedback to policy and decision-makers on the themes discussed.
4. The COVID pandemic disrupted real live audience format, and when physical conversations were possible the numbers were capped to observe social distancing.
5. Two of the conversations (On Technology and Urbanisation) were recorded and shared on BCMD's youtube page during the COVID pandemic. These have attracted viewers - e.g. Urbanisation in Bhutan uploaded in Autumn 2020 received 777 views ( as of July 20, 2021); Technology in Bhutan which included 4 videos received a total of 1,641 views (as of July 20, 2021). This shows the potential of a wider reach by taping each conversation and posting it online.





# Outcomes/ Impact

Outcomes and Impact are discussed against the objectives bulleted below:

- TDJ serves as a vehicle for the development of a community of people who are concerned about national policy and who want to participate in the development of policy through thinking publicly and through conversation.
- TDJ aims to provide a public space in which ideas can be exchanged.
- To introduce new ideas and concepts into the Bhutanese conversation about policies and issues; looking at issues from every possible constructive point of view.



## 5.1 Increased access to TDJ

Access to TDJ has increased steadily over the years as shown in the findings above. TDJ's website and FB received more visits over the years. In terms of accessibility, the

reader's survey shows that 35.5% of respondents read TDJ articles on the website (a few actually say it is easily searchable on google), 25.8% say they get copies at the office, and 16.1% say they read TDJ in college/ libraries.

With the increased access to TDJ, more sections of society, previously with limited access to information on specific issues concerning Bhutan, are now able to read material and think on a variety of issues with diverse perspectives. A cohort of writers have been prompted to look deeper into issues of concern, carry out research and explore important topics.

At least two newspapers have asked to reprint TDJ articles on a regular basis although the editorial team has not yet made a decision on this request.

## 5.2 Increased visibility

*"If you want to know what is happening in Bhutan, read the Druk Journal"*the UN Resident Coordinator, Gerald Daly declared at the closing of Bhutan's BEFIT conference 2018.

1. Increased visibility and readership has resulted in **TDJ being a credible and sought-after publication** on topics concerning contemporary Bhutan. It has also increased public discussion on important topics.

2. Its **visibility has grown among a cross section of society** – from political parties, to academia through the university of Bhutan, and to MPs, thus spreading consciousness on important issues within society. Past and present MPs recall the Journal and its usefulness. It has become a publication known amongst international associations, foundations, and the Bhutanese diaspora outside Bhutan.

3. A few Journal conversations are on youtube and on the national broadcaster, BBS, attracting larger viewership. It is time for TDJ to consider broadening the reach of ideas and to use new formats such as social media to reach a wider audience. After nearly 7 years, TDJ can look at how to reinvent its dissemination.

4. **Visibility has increased internationally.** Since 2016, TDJ became available at the US Library of Congress, widely regarded as the de facto national library in the United States. There is potential to get TDJ listed on other academic libraries specialising in the region or in Asia.

5. International-Bhutan Friendship associations overseas and foundations that promote Bhutan





the issue and spoke at a seminar illustrating increasing interaction with policy agencies at the Gaeddu College – Bhutan’s business college. Suggestions for policy were also shared with the DHI, RMA and others.

- Tourism: In 2020, TDJ issue on tourism was the primary input into policy discussion on the national tourism policy. A conversation with stakeholders and staff of the Tourism Council of Bhutan was instrumental in creating policy debates around the vision of high value low volume and mass tourism. TCB’s chairperson, Foreign Minister Dr Tandin Dorji, attended the conversation and said that: “The suggestions will be taken very seriously when we hold our discussions. Bhutan must have one tourism policy.” TCB posted the issue of TDJ on it’s website, resulting in nearly 2,000 hits. All TCB staff were directed to read the issue. In many ways, The Druk Journal provided many ideas from travel specialists that could have taken months of consultancies to provide.
- Urbanisation : The Thimphu Thrompon (mayor) and a former thrompon along with government representatives, municipal staff, the architect’s association and other stakeholders attended the conversation and shared feedback

on Urbanisation in Bhutan.

- The **Journal contributed new thinking to the national discourse on Education** (Spring 2019) and conducted a conversation with all the presidents of colleges at the RUB. For the first time, all 4 political parties in and outside of Parliament shared their views and vision for Education in TDJ. In this regard, TDJ was able to **cross-fertilise views to enrich the discourse and the larger national vision on Education**. Several of the academics interviewed refer to the Education issue as one that they read.

### 5.3 Contribution to social science & humanities

An outcome of the journal is its contribution **to the scarce development in social science and the humanities** which a society dominated almost solely by bureaucrats, politicians, and business elites needs. When TDJ began in late 2014, there was neither a strong institutional foundation, nor a strong tradition of independent thinking or research in the country (outside of attempts by the media).

Many of the themes of TDJ contribute to the study of social science and humanities. Almost every academic interviewed in this study points out



the acute lack of Bhutanese reading resources and an absence of Bhutan-centric research and publications. TDJ provides content for and “grooms interest in social sciences and humanities” (RTC academic). Other respondents noted the relevance of the issues to their areas of research and study. TDJ’s work fills a vacuum in a society that is trying to understand itself against the tide of globalization, and in a country where academia relies on largely externally published research work. Local resources like TDJ are a must if Bhutan is to move intelligently and consciously into the 21st century.

*“It serves as a useful resource in the absence of researched articles, and many writers are (either) people with credentials and credibility... (or) specialists in their own area – so their opinions do matter.”*

Anju Chettri,  
Media school lecturer,  
Sherubtse College.

#### **5.4 Contribution to academia**

Another important outcome is **TDJ’s increasing presence in academic learning in Bhutan.** TDJ has collaborated with several colleges to undertake TDJ conversations. Soft copies of TDJ are also available in selected college libraries in Bhutan. Theme-based relevance is

key to getting TDJ read in colleges. Librarians from the Thimphu public library, Sherubtse College, Norbuling Rigter College and the Royal Institute of Management report that youth borrow and read the TDJ to prepare for class work, research and the civil service exams. Academics in colleges assign TDJ readings to students.

The principal of Motithang high school finds the TDJ very useful for teachers who have to keep abreast of what is happening in Bhutan. At the Royal Academy in Paro, teachers report high school level students and faculty members reading TDJ.

A respondent to the writers survey finds the conversations useful for schools: *“It was very informative, it widens your perspective. As a teacher, I always believed that teaching and learning only happens inside the four walls of the classroom but the dialogues and conversations are beyond the classroom. And it taught me that learning is, and should be beyond the classroom.”*

#### **5.5 A cross between academic and journalistic writing**

The Druk Journal takes a middle path between academic and journalistic writing to make it more readable for a wider audience. Some academics prefer peer reviewed writing with

more research rigour. Others believe that TDJ is “not competing with academia,” and in fact, provides content that is readable and meets a need in an oral society unused to academic reports. Both are valid perspectives. But to reach TDJ’s overall aim of building a community of thinkers, writers and people comfortable with thinking about and influencing policy, the current approach is more likely to find writers and readers.

A writer for TDJ explains: *“It’s filling a very important gap. It’s great that it’s not overtly academic so it’s a lot more accessible to different audiences.”*

Kencho Pelzom,  
Political Science Lecturer,  
Sherubtse College,  
RTC (2020).

“Intellectual seminars like the Druk Journal is also a way of stimulating a culture of wanting to know more and wanting to learn more. And this is useful... Not everyone has time for formal research that is usually carried out by academics and government researchers, and not all research is able to happen at the level necessary to properly inform decision-making. However, semi-research journals/intellectual magazines such as Druk Journal can make this level of discourse

more accessible to a slightly wider public. A wider range of people will feel like they are involved at a similar level to those who are researchers, planners, thinkers, decision makers. The Journal is at a level somewhere between pure academic research and pure public media (news, magazines, social media). I think **this was a gap that needed to be bridged,** and in that way the Journal is very useful. **It promotes a higher level of discourse, but is still accessible to many.”**

Samir Patel,  
Royal Thimphu College,  
Associate Dean of Academic Affairs.

## 5.6 Mentoring and training of new writers

New and young writers are mentored in constructing their views, research, and articles and have them published. Interviews and surveys with writers show that participating in TDJ has helped them professionally, opened up opportunities and built confidence in their ability to share thoughts. Further insights are provided as follows:

- *“It’s relevant for me as I write consulting reports. It’s made me think about the issues more deeply. Needing to be articulate helped me clarify my ideas and thoughts.”*



- “As a journalist, contributing to TDJ helped me gain research and long-form writing experience.”
- “TDJ gave me the experience of doing a comprehensive study. It strengthened my research skills and data collection. Feedback from the editor helped organise my thoughts to ensure the flow of ideas.”

### 5.7. Fostering independent thinking

While newspapers, TV and Social media are getting more popular, they are rife with memes, misinformation and disinformation. More needs to be done to encourage open independent thinking in Bhutan that does not hide behind anonymity and that is shared in a spirit of civility. The Druk Journal has taken on some challenging topics and encouraged diversity of thoughts

and opinions to emerge. “I never thought we could have conversations like these,” commented a Bhutanese development worker who attended her first TDJ conversation.

TDJ has developed the confidence of writers. Several interviewees noted that writing for TDJ has given them the confidence to continue doing research on policy documents and interacting with government and development partners on issues.

“I think the Druk Journal is the only one in its category – promoting independent thinking, thought provoking, and wide-ranging in terms of the topics it covers.”

Azusa Kubota,  
UNDP Resident Representative

*TDJ Conversation on Tourism in Bhutan attended by tourism stakeholders and policy /decision makers. The chairperson of the Tourism Council, Lyonpo Tandi Dorji was also present. ▼*



Reports from past conversations show that TDJ was able to come up with independent ideas and suggestions that go a long way toward changing the way we think about ourselves in Bhutan. A conversation on Youth Matters in 2016, observed:

*“We agreed that asking questions is an important part of governance. It is not anti-government... asking good questions is not anti-anything. In a democracy, you agree to disagree. And it is through debate that we build democratic culture and values...”*

*The participants agreed that citizens had to take more responsibility in governance. One raised the example of central schools, saying that they did not understand the concept because it wasn't discussed with them. It was generally agreed that people should question the government and provide feedback through the representatives who they voted for..... It may be a simplistic interpretation but one conclusion the conversation came to was that there is no sense of community among the current generation of Bhutanese. We live in a hierarchical society and the so-called process of development has almost completely broken down existing social structures.”*

## **5.8 Modelling an open, participatory & credible space for discourse**

The interviews and findings indicate that **TDJ has contributed in Bhutan, or at least in pockets of Bhutan, to the creation of an open society in which public space is being expanded.** In doing so, TDJ is contributing to the enlargement of the boundaries of free speech and creative thought.

TDJ has opened up public/ civic space in a country where the government is the main facilitator of forums and seminars related to development and society. The Druk Journal is currently the only journal in Bhutan required to be licensed by the regulator, BICMA, because it is published by a non-government organisation. There are about a dozen journals in Bhutan, most of them are published by colleges or government departments and do not require registration.

TDJ conversations have a broad mix of participants representing civil society. This has helped to break down societal hierarchy and hesitation in speaking in public forums and made civic space more visible in an evolving democracy. The informal and inclusive conversations are creating a new culture of discourse that has helped strengthen public discourse among youth, decision-makers, civil



society, and the private sector.

A faculty member, Anju Chettri, recalls the first time such a journal conversation was held at Sherubtse College. *“After that, students asked for more such conversations to cover diverse and interdisciplinary topics. They found the informal manner of discussion conducive to triggering more interest in other topics.”*

Many government-led forums to face the potential risk of being held in so-called ‘echo chambers of civil servants’ where new ideas and views are often missing. Getting open participation from citizens is, however, a work in progress. A writer for TDJ suggests: *“ There should be more intentional outreach towards schools and different institutions that could have a more meaningful impact. People who have the same views reading the journal perpetuates an echo chamber. So TDJ should be trying to expand on different audiences that can have an impact. Not just government institutions, but also the youth.”*

TDJ’s characteristic informal style used to address serious topics is used in other BCMD forums. This has helped to grow -- albeit slowly -- a culture of democracy in the capital, which is the heart of the state and home of decision and policy-makers.

*“Many people hide (on) social media and hesitate to talk upfront, so it’s important that TDJ and other forums are there to model a more engaged conversation even in academia,”* said Lopon Lungten Gyatsho, the president of the College of Language and Cultural Studies (CLCS). MPs, other academics and media professionals share this view and say that this cultural tendency needs to change in a democracy. As critical exchanges increase in a democratic society, avenues for expression in print and discussion forums must be available where a cross section of society can meet and push the boundaries of free and responsible speech.

While it is still too early to assess the longer-term impact, TDJ has modelled a form of discourse that Bhutan benefits from; one in which people from across society, age groups and even political views can come together to deliberate and debate, in a civil manner and to co-generate ideas and suggestions on many pressing concerns.

A writer and reader recommended, *“more effort needs to be made to engage and keep the writers engaged in the dissemination of the ideas and efforts in influencing discourses, policies and decisions. They may not be directly engaged*

*in the conversation/dialogue, but by being kept updated of what has happened as a result (as many are in the position of power and decision making), they could probably be an effective bridge in narrowing the gap between discourse/ideas and action/implementation. I feel we enjoy talking about issues, but action is not catching up, resulting in limited change."*

### **Moving to the next level of engagement**

Survey respondents suggest that people feel TDJ could move to the next level of engagement: *"The conversations attended only by passionate people can't make a difference in the community or society, so you need to invite people in key positions or proactive CS actors. Only then can it have a positive influence on society."*

### **5.9 Interviews & surveys with writers show other outcomes/impacts**

*"After writing for TDJ, I have written two other articles for the RIM journal. I also used my TDJ articles as my references. And I did a study on entrepreneurship education with TDJ as my source."*

*"I felt encouraged that as long as you keep writing, your thoughts have relevance."*

*"Many said that they have read my article and I have been getting positive responses from them."*

*"The article I contributed helped me as a journalism trainer."*

*"A UNDP official commented on my article... it suggests that TDJ has currency and relevance in Bhutan's policy decisions."*

Readers surveyed made practical suggestions on improving citation information such as including a digital object identifier. They made practical suggestions to improve editorial processes and referencing.

One of the objectives of TDJ is to encourage among Bhutanese a greater awareness of the experience of other countries in those areas of political, social, economic and cultural experimentation that are relevant to our own concerns.

About a third of the writers are international contributors and come from a range of backgrounds from non-profits, academics, MPs, to researchers, UN development workers, technology specialists, journalists and many more. The





The report points out the importance of BCMD’s objective to create public spaces for civic discourse: “This is yet another important objective that has not been addressed by any other agency, government or otherwise. BCMD hosts forums, seminars, conversations, and dialogues with a cross-section of people to foster a more open, frank, inclusive, and tolerant discussions on important national policies and issues. This encompasses a broad range of population, including the youth.”







# The Opportunities going forward

Looking ahead, TDJ can strengthen and consolidate its reach and impact. This evaluation exercise indicates opportunities for the Journal's way forward.

Some key questions to think about, include how TDJ might build on the current group of readers, conversation participants, followers and writers? How might TDJ mentor new and aspiring writers? How will TDJ bring on board more key persons in policy-making to read, contribute to and participate in TDJ? How can TDJ bring wider and deeper perspectives to policy and decision-making? How may TDJ make more efforts to reach the civil service and policy-makers?

## **How might TDJ build on the current group of readers, conversation participants, followers and writers?**

1. Academia continues to be an important target group for TDJ.



The journal can increase its collaboration with colleges and institutes of learning. TDJ can deepen engagement with teacher trainees, teachers and faculty members in colleges who can spread awareness of and continue discussions on many issues. There's also the possibility of teaming up with colleges to research and write articles.

2. Strengthen public discourse and public voices. Activities can continue to emphasise diversity of views as the contest of ideas make a democracy more vibrant. TDJ's attempts to get colleges to host conversations can be stepped up , colleges can be encouraged to and offer talks and classes related to the themes of TDJ.
3. Expand reach through academic web sources, youtube, media e.g. recording and sharing conversations online or through podcasts to spread ideas in Bhutan and beyond. The Journal's role to model safe spaces for open discussion is still a priority.
4. Try to reach the Bhutanese diaspora e.g. the Bhutanese students abroad – e.g. through the Bhutanese missions or Students' associations abroad. Also reach out to the friendship associations e.g. Japan-Bhutan friendship

association, the German-Bhutan friendship association etc. Reach out more actively to the few regional and international research centres focusing on Asia, the Himalayas, or on Democracy.

5. Re-visit TDJ's marketing plan and step up social media promotion. Remind participants at conversations on how to take action to support TDJ e.g. to like the FB and website, share the links, share hard copies etc. Occasional newspaper adverts would be useful to point people to TDJ.

**How might TDJ mentor new and aspiring writers?**

1. In a society with a shortage of writers and readers, TDJ may consider hosting short writing sessions/workshops to promote writing for the journal.
2. Update and review the data on participants and communicate regularly with them on updates, new issues, etc. This will lead to the creation of network of TDJ readers.

**How will TDJ bring on board more key persons in policy-making and the civil service to read, contribute to and participate in TDJ?**

1. BCMD is now acting as a catalyst for thinking on civil society,

democracy and other matters related to governance and society in Bhutan. For future issues, BCMD can share these findings and recommendations more actively with all political parties to widen discussion and thinking on critical issues that Bhutan faces. It can call on writers and conversation participants to share ideas and lobby for change wherever possible.

2. Ensure that decision-makers in the three arms of government (judiciary, executive and legislature) media and institutions have access to TDJ, see that they not only have copies, but encourage them to refer to TDJ to widen their understanding of how people think, what they've discovered, their concerns and suggestions as Bhutan moves into a post-COVID world.

**How can TDJ bring wider and deeper perspectives to policy and decision-making? How may TDJ direct more effort to reach the civil service and policy-makers?**

1. It is widely accepted that reading is not a strong habit in Bhutan; even policy-makers and the educated are known to read only for work. An MP suggested that TDJ consider providing key findings in infographics to reach those who

do not read. A practical suggestion is to provide each conversation in video form to generate viewership.

2. Conversations are popular in an oral society but the trick of a public forum is in making everyone feel more comfortable and safe in speaking up and sharing contrary views. In the early years, TDJ carefully screened all its invitees to the conversation and aimed to keep them small in number (not more than 35) persons to create a more informal and less intimidating environment. This is still found necessary for broader perspectives to emerge. Skillful moderation is needed to bring out diverse opinions.

**Bolder voices and apt themes**

1. TDJ can revisit and go deeper into some of the earlier themes to examine change. Academics have recommended that themes like democracy, political transition, civil society, even identity are themes that can be expanded. Interviewees find the honest discussions and the critical statements that emerge refreshing. An MP even suggested that TDJ can be more provocative in conversations. The challenge is how to encourage more critical writers to emerge, thus mentoring of writers needs to continue.



▲ *Conversations and seminars are held in colleges across Bhutan*

2. Work with targeted organizations to prepare TDJ themes to serve as an intellectual input into any policy review or interests. Approach the GNHC, the Royal Institute of Management, and other programmes to host conversations with them. Turn The Druk Journal into a discussion with the planning departments in government and to trigger impact on policy.

will take effort, it can be done in the shortened key phrases or quotations.

2. Media managers suggest that TDJ consider re-printing articles in a major newspaper on a regular basis to reach other readers. TDJ can consider providing just the editorial or the framing/lead article in each thematic edition to be re-produced and then to drive traffic to other articles on TDJ’s website.

**Develop a socialisation plan**

1. Ensure that key persons in the civil service and in policy-making read the journal and its ideas. The UNDP recommends TDJ prepare key messages and advocacy points to be shared and explained to the intended government audience – such as a brief, or a short version of a report, to guide further discussions. While this

3. TDJ can go into partnership with local broadcasters to develop a series of conversations for broadcast. Consider doing this in Dzongkha to reach a wider audience.

**Grow outreach/ dissemination**

1. Expand outreach through social







# Conclusion

The DRUK JOURNAL is contributing to Bhutan's growth as a democracy and as a modern nation state. It is becoming an increasingly vibrant public space in which contributors are encouraged to expand the national discourse by introducing new ideas and concepts into the Bhutanese conversation. Through regular publications, an interactive website, and open discussions after each edition. TDJ engages Bhutanese society in conversation so that all citizens can exchange open and frank views on national policies and issues that are important for Bhutan.

Overall, The Druk Journal has become a credible source of ideas and information on issues considered important for Bhutan. It has nurtured a cohort of people interested in the way Bhutanese politics, society and nation is developing. TDJ's overall broad objective of creating a community of thinkers and writers needs continued work.



This M&E has pointed out some wider implications and shared ideas on the way forward.

TDJ is one of the first forums to invite diversity in representation, including political parties to participate in open forums.

TDJ has made the point that democracy is not just about voting or electing leaders, but getting people to express themselves, take part in, give feedback and suggestions to decision-makers and interact with fellow citizens. The underlying premise is that for a community of thinkers who care about Bhutan, the community must realise that we are not just bystanders, but members of an active citizenry with views, concerns, needs, and responsibilities. The 13 issues raised have brought out many new topics and diversity of views that are directly linked to the way Bhutan is now and its trajectory for the future. TDJ's challenge remains how to influence decision-makers to seek evidence and carry out research before making decisions that affect the lives of the people and the future of Bhutan.

More effort can be made to get the attention of a civil service that is unfamiliar with working with civil society, and is, itself, grappling with the forces of political change in terms

of working with elected MPs. In a country averse to disharmony and political divides, and with the rules on being “apolitical” in the civil service where the best educated are employed, it is a challenge to bring people into public domain to speak honestly about issues. This requires constant review and skillful approaches to bring ideas out in the open.

*“You are the leaders. TDJ is among the first, if not the first, to promote more public discourse; and I actually think it's really important. The Druk Journal is doing something powerful.”*

Gerald Daly,  
UN Resident Coordinator.

The format TDJ has chosen remains valid in a country where academic learning is characterised by lower levels of reading and analysis, and an aversion to longer academic research content. As the president of a college points out, the lack of a reading habit is a societal problem that must be addressed but TDJ provides more accessible reading and ideas that are needed to deepen academic interests.

TDJ must continue to **create a dynamic space** that is civil, democratic and open to diverse views in order to discover new ideas required to reimagine what Bhutan

can be like in the 21st century.

Finally, TDJ is recording history in a country that is undergoing rapid transformation. TDJ is an important documentation of contemporary concerns and emerging voices in an evolving democracy.



# References

Website

[www.drukjournal.bt](http://www.drukjournal.bt)

Facebook

[https://www.facebook.com/  
Drukjournal](https://www.facebook.com/Drukjournal)

Youtube: Bhutan Centre for Media  
and Democracy

[https://www.youtube.com/c/  
TheBcmd/videos](https://www.youtube.com/c/TheBcmd/videos)

Reports on conversations held:

<http://drukjournal.bt/conversation/>  
[http://drukjournal.bt/wp-content/  
uploads/2019/12/Conversation-  
Report.pdf](http://drukjournal.bt/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Conversation-Report.pdf)

Helvetas, Bhutan, CSO Policy Study,  
For services related to civil society in  
Bhutan, Tenzing Consultancy, 2019



# Annexe 1: List of interviewees

1	MP Dawa	12	Samir Patel, RTC
2	MP Passang	13	Kencho Pelzom, RTC
3	Ugen Penjore, Media	14	Anju, Sherubtse College
4	TCB prog. officer, Damcho Rinzin	15	Tashi Choiphel, Sherubtse College
5	Royal Academy, Karma Tenzin	16	Leki, Sherubtse College
6	Ministry of Health, former contributor, Kinley	17	Sonam Choiden, President, Gaeddu College
7	Dasho Lungten Drubgyu, OAG	18	Lhato Jamba, Gyalpoishing College president
8	Gerald Daly, Resident Coordinator UN	19	Lingchen, head librarian, Sherubtse Library
9	Azusa Kubota, UNDP Bhutan resident representative	20	Tshering, Thimphu public library head
10	Bjorn Melgaard, Adviser/ editorial team member	21	Thakur Singh Powdyel, former minister, RTC president, educationist
11	Dr Karma Phuntsho, Adviser/ editorial team member	22	Lopen Lungten Gyatso, CLCS President

# Annexe 2 : The Druk Journal M&E Questionnaire

## Writers

- 1. What is your experience of writing for The Druk Journal? Share your experience.
  - a. What did you learn from having written for TDJ?
  - b. Has writing for the TDJ enhanced your confidence or interest in writing? If so, how?
  
- 2. What do you see as a result of your contribution to The Druk Journal?
  - a. Were you invited to speak at any event regarding your DJ article? If yes, how many times and where and what was the objective of the event/s? What difference did it make in your personal, civic or professional life?
  - b. Who in your view is making use of or should make use of the TDJ (list them) and for what purpose/s?
  - c. Do you see TDJ making a difference in influencing discourses, policies, decisions etc? How?
  
- 3. TDJ website: Did you know all TDJ articles were available on our website?
  - a. How easy is it to navigate and cite the articles?
  - b. Any feedback on TDJ's website?
  
- 4. Did you attend any of The DJ conversations?
  - a. How informative and useful were the conversations?
  - b. What suggestions do you have to make it more effective?
  
- 5. What challenges did you face in writing the TDJ or in accessing TDJ?
  
- 6. Any overall suggestions for the improvement of TDJ and its reach?
  
- 7. Any overall comments on the role of TDJ in Bhutanese society or in influencing decision-making?

## Readers

1. Age
  - a. 17 and below
  - b. 18-25
  - c. 26-34
  - d. 35-49
  - e. 50 and above
  
2. Gender
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Prefer not to say
  
3. Tick most relevant -
  - a. Students
  - b. Social Worker
  - c. Academicians, Educators
  - d. Policy Makers, Civil Servants
  - e. Parliamentarians, Political Party member
  - f. Consultant
  - g. Development Partners
  - h. Researchers
  - i. Private Sector, Social Entrepreneurs
  
4. How did you come to know about TDJ? Eg. Social media, College, bookstore etc.
  
5. What do you use TDJ for? (Select all that apply)
  - a. Writing college/research papers
  - b. To stay updated on current issues
  - c. To prepare for interviews/entrance examinations
  - d. To prepare for public talks/conversations/forums
  - e. Others: list \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Did you refer to any TDJ articles for your own
  - i. Research
  - ii coursework
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

7. If yes, did you face any difficulty in citing the articles? Please explain
8. Did you know TDJ articles are available on our website?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
9. Did you face any difficulty while accessing.using our website?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
10. If yes, what difficulty did you experience?
11. Do you have any suggestions on how we could improve our website?
12. How easy is it to get a copy of TDJ? Either soft or hard copy.
13. I get a hard copy of TDJ at
  - a. Website
  - b. Public Library
  - c. College/School Library
  - d. Office
  - e. Bookstore
  - f. Others \_\_\_\_\_
14. Would you recommend the Druk Journal to any of the following? (Select all that apply)
  - a. Friends
  - b. Family
  - c. Colleagues
  - d. International Contacts
  - e. Colle/Universities
  - f. Schools
15. Do you have any suggestions on improving TDJ?
16. Any overall comments on the role of TDJ in Bhutanese society or in influencing decision-making?