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THE WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO CIVIC EDUCATION: **A BCMD STORY**

The whole-school approach to civic education: A BCMD story

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CONTENTS

1

RATIONALE

2

BHUTAN CENTRE FOR MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

4

CIVIC EDUCATION IN BHUTAN: CURRENT SCENARIO

Goals

Initial Years

Transition to Whole School

Approach to Civic Education

11

THE WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO CIVIC EDUCATION

Design of the Project

13

PEDAGOGICAL PROCESS

Step 1: Formation of the Town
Committee

Step 2: Training of Trainers

Step 3: Step-down Training

Step 4: Field Work Community

Mapping

Step 5: Town Hall Meetings

Step 6: Local Action Projects

Step 7: Reflection

25

LEARNING OUTCOMES

28

CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS

30

INTEGRATING WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO A CIVIC EDUCATION INTO BHUTANESE SCHOOLS

32

CONCLUSION

33

REFERENCES

RATIONALE

Civic education is also known as citizen education or democracy education. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) defines civic education as equipping and empowering citizens to participate in democratic processes and community affairs.

The account on the whole-school approach to civic education describes the pilot testing of an experiential and whole-school approach to civic education in two pilot schools in Paro. This report presents an analysis of the results and lessons and recommends strategies to integrate the whole-school approach to civic education in the school system.

This report serves as a resource for educators and policymakers to advance more effective civic education in the country.

You can find resources on civic education at www.bcmt.bt.

THE BHUTAN CENTRE FOR MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

As one of the first civil society organisations registered in Bhutan, the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) has been actively nurturing democracy through civic engagement, public discourse and media literacy for more than

12 years (See Figure 1). BCMD works with a cross-section of society ranging from youths, teachers, local government officials, media professionals, and civil society members to marginalised groups like people with disabilities, monks and nuns and LGBTI members.



Fig.1. Three programme areas of BCMD



Civic education, Media and Democracy literacy are the primary focus areas of BCMD.

These programmes strive to generate a more democratically active society by inspiring citizens to use their voice, fostering a sense of ownership of their communities and being a part of the solution to their community issues.

In 2013, BCMD piloted the first community mapping workshop where students from across Bhutan explored five communities in Thimphu. The participants catalogued assets and issues in the community and explored solutions and opportunities for change. The overarching goal was to make participants develop a sense of ownership of their

community and show how they can contribute to shaping their communities.

Since then, BCMD has been educating the youth and others on active citizenship, making them aware of community issues and empowering them to carry out local initiatives in their communities.

CIVIC EDUCATION IN BHUTAN: THE CURRENT SCENARIO

The teaching of Bhutan History started only in 1994 as a subject from class VII to XII. Before that, students studied World History, Indian History and Indian Civics. Since then, several revisions reflected national priorities, culture and society in the history curriculum.

Bhutan Civics was introduced to the schools in 2008 when the country transitioned to a democratic constitutional monarchy. The subject focused on learning about different government institutions, the power and roles of state authorities and citizen roles and responsibilities. History and civics are mandatory

subjects up to class X after which students can choose depending on their stream after class X.

In 2015, the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) initiated Democracy clubs in schools and educational institutes to supplement civic education to nurture a more engaged citizenry. The Democracy clubs aimed to engage students in civic action, and inform and educate them on the electoral process and the roles and responsibilities of citizens (Election Commission of Bhutan, 2015).

Civic education is not of the best standard in Bhutan. Both teachers and students place less emphasis on civic education. It is a small part of the history curriculum



and carries less weightage in examinations and hence receives less teaching time (Wangmo, 2016). According to Wangmo, teachers are not proficient, students see civic learning as a subject only for aspiring politicians, and civic learning was not connected to the realities of the student life and hence was learnt only for the sake of examination. A more recent study found limited knowledge of their civic rights and responsibilities in students (BCMD, 2020).

The Department of Curriculum and Professional Development, Ministry of Education launched the National School Curriculum framework in 2021. The new framework introduces the Social

Studies curriculum for classes IV to VI and History, Civics and Citizenship education for classes VII to XII. The Social Studies curriculum promotes civic and social competencies, the worldview of interconnectedness, interdependence, coexistence, and the values of *tha dhamtshi* and *ley judrey*¹. From class IV onwards, learners are introduced to concepts of community, culture and values to build a base for the understanding of their role in the community, the role of local governments and elected leaders in community development (Department of Curriculum and Professional Development, 2022). The curriculum framework also encourages teachers to build healthy relationships with the

community to render support and facilitation for the effective teaching and learning of social studies.

The History, Civics and Citizenship education curriculum aims to provide learners with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be active citizens in national and international societies. Civic literacy, civic identity, civic engagement, citizenship, community cohesion, civic-mindedness and lessons on *ley judrey* and *tha damtshi* are in the curriculum (Department of Curriculum and Professional Development, 2022). The curriculum framework includes research work, place-based education and experiential learning approaches to connect

learners and their communities to enhance learner engagement.

The principles underpinning the whole-school approach to civic education are in coherence with the National Education Framework. The whole school approach to civic education provides the opportunity to take civic learning out of the classroom and into the communities so that learners practise their civic learning.

Goals

The BCMD's civic education aims to

1. inspire youth as community-based change agents,

¹*Tha Damtshi* and *Ley Judrey* are Buddhist cultural values. *Ley Judrey* stems from the interdependent world view and translates to "good begets good". *Tha Damtshi* equates to commitment or loyalty in relationships.



2. deepen a sense of belongingness and responsibility towards their community, and
3. empower youth with skills of inquiry, research and critical thinking (Bhutan Center for Media and Democracy, 2019)

The early years

The whole-school approach to civic education emerged gradually from trials of different strategies and a reflective process of continuously improving on it.



The whole-school approach to civic education first began as a Community Mapping project in 2013 when BCMD trained Media Nomads² to map communities in Thimphu district and to bring attention of the concerned authorities to the issues in the communities and to propose solutions.

As a young democracy, when authorities were still learning to take feedback from citizens, the above approach faced resistance. Bringing community issues to light by young people was unheard of in the past, and authorities perceived the exercise as a criticism of their work and not as a learning exercise in nurturing a

generation of active and engaged citizens who would learn to contribute to the development of their communities. This stumbling block necessitated strategising.

In 2016, BCMD changed its strategy from capacitating youths across the country to forging partnership with Paro District Administration. It formed a Town Committee³ composed of the Dzongdag (District Governor), sector heads, elected leaders, civil society members and community representatives; oriented it to the aims, objectives and activities of the civic education project.

The project trained 2-3 teachers from each school in Paro on



mapping community issues and assets⁴ and media and democracy literacy. The teachers facilitated a similar workshop on community mapping in their schools with the rest of the teachers and students. The teachers and students then implemented small local initiatives to address the problems identified.

In this phase, BCMD observed that teachers trained by BCMD to map communities⁴ faced challenges in initiating activities in their schools. Colleagues who did not see the connection between this initiative and the broader learning goals of civic education became a source of criticism and resistance. BCMD learned that it was difficult for new ideas to take

root in the school by training only 2-3 teachers from each school.

Transition to Whole-School Approach

It was evident from the trials and errors of previous strategies that in a young democratic country like Bhutan, it is not enough to educate and empower the youth alone, but an intergenerational approach was necessary.

According to Bennet, Wells and Rank (2009), there are two distinct paradigms of citizenship in many democracies - the dutiful citizen and the actualising citizen. Dutiful citizens are of the older generation who believe voting is the core democratic act, have a

² Media Nomads are alumni of BCMD's youth programme. These youths have pledged to spread the learning from the media literacy workshops by BCMD. In 2013, the Media Nomads were also trained in mapping communities to bring the attention of authorities on issues in the communities.

³ An informal committee formed in the district with the Governor as the Chairman for the implementation of the civic education project.

strong sense of duty to participate and have higher trust in leaders and media. The actualising citizens are more critical of the media and politicians, feel a weak sense of duty to participate in government and are focused on volunteering and social activism. Concerning Bhutan, it is safe to assume that a majority fits in the dutiful citizen category. Citizens still believe in the power and authority of the government and their political leaders and confine their responsibility as a citizen to voting for their leaders and the government and expect them to provide developmental services and facilities in turn.

BCMD's whole-school approach to civic education triggers more active engagement by training

the school community. It involves the students, teachers, parents, as well as residents of the community. BCMD recognises that training the youth and the whole community is crucial to nurture a democratic culture. For change to happen, there is a need for a critical mass of supporters (Anderson & Anderson, 2003).

⁴ Asset-based community mapping guide is one of the key resources for civic education developed by BCMD



THE WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO CIVIC EDUCATION

Design of the Project

The whole-school approach to civic education came into being in 2019, funded by the Bhutan Foundation. In addition to the partnership with Paro District Administration, BCMD partnered with Shaba and Drukgyel Central schools. This new approach engaged teachers, students, parents, and Local Government elected leaders and administrators in the district.

The project design became more complex; it included multiple beneficiaries capacitating them on various civic education

programmes. In addition to the Asset-based Community Mapping program and the Media and Democracy Literacy, the project developed two new programmes based on the findings of a baseline study – 1) Nurturing Student Representatives and 2) GNH-based Participatory Planning. The Nurturing Student Representatives built teachers' capacity to prepare more democratic student leaders and to broaden their role from being a representative of the authority to being a representative of the student body. The GNH-based participatory planning introduced the elected leaders to more complex ways of analysing community issues and facilitating more inclusive and participatory community consultations and

meetings. Figure 2 illustrates the multiple stakeholders involved and the capacity development programmes in the whole-school approach to civic education.

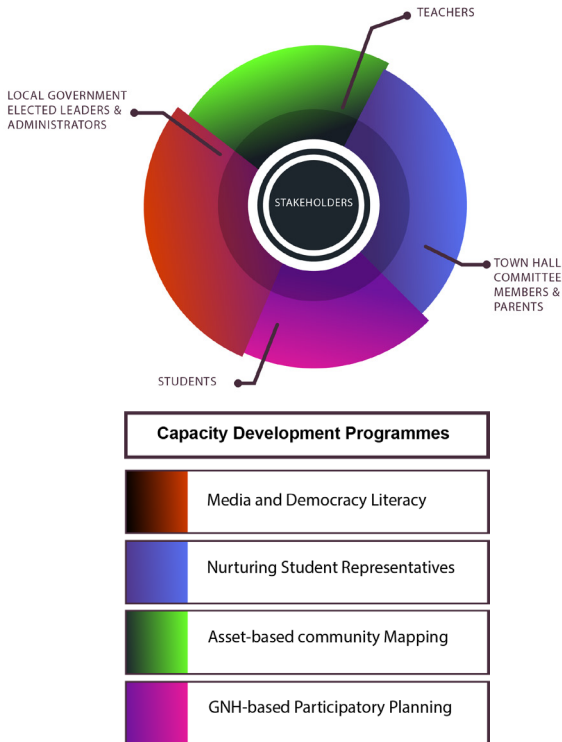


Fig. 2. Stakeholders and core capacity development programmes of Project Mikhung



PEDAGOGICAL PROCESS

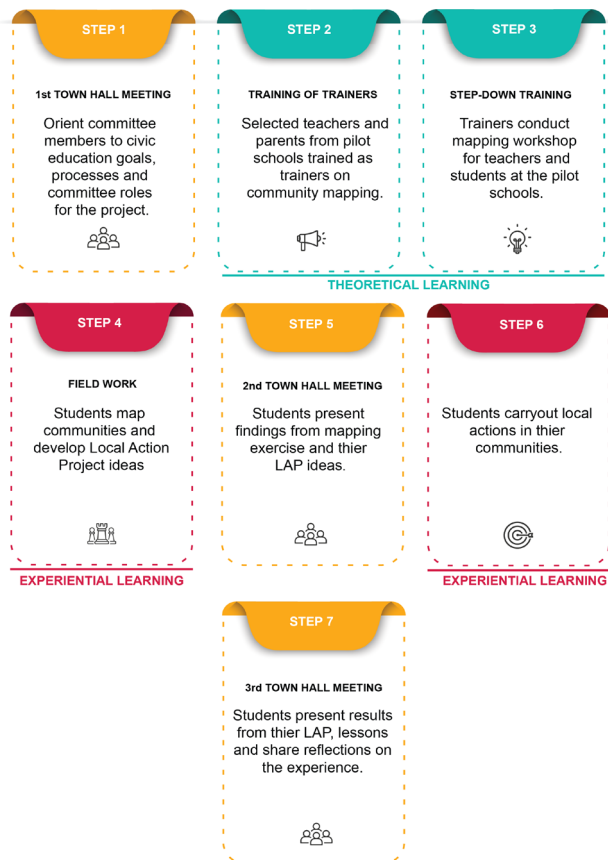


Fig. 3. The process of the whole school approach to civic education

Step 1: Formation of the Town Committee

The first step in the whole-school approach to civic education is to form the Town Hall Committee through a Memorandum of Understanding with the District Administration. The Dzongdag is the chairman of the Committee. Other members include the Dzongkhag administrators, local government officials, municipality, civil society organisations, schools and a few community residents.

The Town Hall is “a platform for the planners, policy-makers and the citizens to engage in open and inclusive discussion and make democratic decisions; model a bottoms-up approach to raising community issues, discussion and deliberation” (Bhutan Centre for

Media and Democracy, 2018).

BCMD proposes three town hall meetings in a year; 1st – for orientation, 2nd – for a presentation and deliberation on local action ideas and 3rd – for the evaluation and celebration of learning from the project (see more explanation in the subsequent sections).

Step 2. Training of Trainers

The whole-school approach to civic education begins with the training of trainers offered to select members of the school, local government representatives and parents from the pilot schools.

Asset-Based Community Mapping Guide and Media and Democracy



Core responsibilities of the town hall committee

1. To identify and discuss priority issues for the community and to decide how to tackle or address these issues.
2. To determine how the community can assist community mappers in carrying out local action activities.
3. To guide and approve the proposals to address local issues from community mappers.
4. To collectively develop a work plan to address priority issues through collaborative efforts between governments and community representatives.
5. To review and evaluate local action project activities.

Literacy guides are two resources for the schools in Project Mikhung. Elected leaders and administrators of Local Government undergo additional training on Gross National Happiness-based participatory planning.⁵

a) Asset-based Community Mapping

1. Role of citizens in community development: The training emphasises the importance of engaging citizens in community-level discussion and decision-making with the premise that community members have a good understanding of their issues and are in the best position to propose workable solutions.

⁵ The Gross National Happiness-based (GNH) participatory planning is for elected leaders. This program equips the LG leaders and administrators with tools to facilitate consultation with citizens to analyse communities through the lens of GNH and to co-develop community plans. This is not discussed in this report as this new program specifically focuses on the LG capacity building.

2. Community mapping skills: The project presents simple ideas and skills to map community issues and assets.

3. Research and interviewing skills: These skills are an integral part of community mapping for the participants to interview residents and map community issues and resources. Participants learn to critically analyse information and use data and evidence to develop project proposals.

4. Ethics: Informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, integrity, and respect are ethical principles integral to community engagement.

5. Facilitation skills: The facilitation skills training for

trainers explain how to facilitate the step-down training at their respective schools. This session shows the difference between facilitation and teaching.

b) Media and Democracy literacy

This workshop introduces participants to the role of media in a democracy, the core concepts of media, how to evaluate sources, judge the credibility of news and distinguish news from other media information and fake news. This workshop develops critical thinking and fosters the safe use of social media.

Step 3: Step-down training

The teachers trained in facilitating community mapping workshops



conduct step-down training at their respective schools. Step-down training is the stage where there is exponential increase in the number of people trained

in community mapping and building. The trainers contribute to the professional development of their colleagues while further deepening their learning.



Photo 1. Students making community maps and presenting during the step-down training.

Step 4: Community Mapping

The community mapping activity is the first experiential learning phase of the whole-school process. For most participants, this is the first time they walk into a community and take a good look around. The mapping activity encourages participants to view the community through an appreciative lens and record both positive (assets) and negative (issues) findings. Participants engage with the community members through interviews and discussions.



Photo 2. LG participants sharing their findings from GNH-based Participatory Planning

Once they have collected all their data, the students start analysing it and develop a physical map of the community detailing all the assets they have observed and issues reported by the community members. The group discusses

possible solutions and prepares to present them to the town hall committee.



Photo 3. Teachers and community members creating portfolios of communities they mapped.



For the Community , By the Community

Vision:

A safe, green, clean and culturally vibrant town

Mission:

To nurture a healthy, peaceful, inclusive and sustainable community living in harmony

Strategy:

1. Strengthening collaboration and coordination amongst stakeholder for stronger implementation of laws.
2. A GNH-approach to sustainable town development - balancing urbanisation with tradition, culture and environmental preservation.
3. Investing in community well-being with recreational facilities that meaningfully engages all promoting a physically, psychologically and spiritually healthy community.
4. Enhancing community vitality by making citizen participation and engagement a common practice in urban planning and development processes and capitalizing on the creativity and ingenuity of diverse minds.

Step 5: Town Hall Meetings

The Town Hall Committee meets three times from the commencement of the project till the completion of local action and propose project ideas. The third Town Hall Meeting at the end of the whole process of the project is a platform to present the results of projects. The first meeting is to orient them on the goals of the civic education project, activities and the Committee roles and responsibilities. In the second Town Hall Meeting, the youth present the findings from the community mapping exercise the Local Action Projects, challenges, reflections and lessons.

Town Hall deliberations are moderated by BCMD to model a

safe and open space where

1. decision-makers learn to receive comments, feedback and ideas from citizens;
2. citizens and authorities engage in dialogues to explore and probe issues for clarity, direction; and
3. to make democratic decisions on community matters

The facilitator sets the tone of the Town Hall. The tendency is to revert to the traditional practice of people in authority judging the ideas from the youths or to take on a defensive position when citizens raise issues and concerns. The facilitator must iterate that this platform is a learning space for adults and



The Value of the Town Hall Committee to Civic Education

An informal inter-generational learning space

The platform not only serves as an informal inter-generational learning space for both adults and youth, but they get instant feedback and suggestions from the committee members who are grounded in the reality of dealing with community development on a daily basis. Public servants and elected leaders in the committee get to hear youth's perspectives on issues.

Extend learning beyond the prescribed curriculum

Youths learn about the public policies that govern local development. They discover the complexities of making decisions for public issues which have an effect on various stakeholders. By engaging with the local leaders and members of the government agencies, youths learn about the roles and responsibilities of public servants and the members of the community.

Critical thinking and public speaking skills

The whole process of designing a proposal and presenting it to the town committee is a learning process for the youths. They learn to create portfolios, make researched arguments and hone their public speaking and critical thinking skills.

youth; the deliberation is on issues and the shared goal of collectively resolving issues.

Step 6: Local Action Projects

After comments and feedback on the proposed Local Action ideas, the youth implement the projects in the communities. The phase extends over a couple of months, depending on the complexity of the local action projects. Students carry out local action projects during club periods, weekends or on school vacations.

Tackling a real-life issue provides a rich learning experience that illustrates the complexities of solving real-life issues that are hard to capture in textbooks.

Step 7: Reflection

At the 3rd Town Hall meeting, the youths make their final presentation on the results of their local action projects. During this meeting, students reflect on their experiences of mapping and carrying out local action projects. Students use this platform to share their learning experiences and their personal developments.

The final Town Hall meeting is a celebration of the experience and learning. The Town Committee awards certificates of recognition to the best Local Action Project. The best Local Action Project is decided based on the evidence for proper mapping and conceptualisation of the project considering its sustainability, built



implementation and benefits to the community. An important criterion is the evidence of civic learning in the youth involved gauged through their reports and presentation to the Town Hall Committee. All participants receive certificates of participation to motivate civic action and volunteerism.

The main aim of any civic education programme is to enhance democratic behaviours and attitudes and to develop informed, effective and responsible citizens. Civic education refers to the provision of knowledge, skills and attitudes to prepare and inspire people to engage in democratic processes, such as the understanding of the constitution of Bhutan, the

government, the political system and the Bhutanese democratic system. Civic knowledge also includes knowledge of citizen rights, roles and responsibilities. Intellectual skills include critical thinking, communications and participatory skills such as interacting, engaging, and petitioning. The final part of civic education is civic attitudes which refer to individual outlook. Civic attitudes include respect for diversity, tolerance, courage, transparency, responsibility and concern for the common good.

Civic education programmes are most effective when 1) sessions are frequent, 2) methods are participatory, 3) teachers are knowledgeable and inspiring, 4) opportunities for participation are

right into the programme, and 5) there is immersion in democratic practices (USAID, 2002). The whole-school approach to civic education of BCMD fulfils almost all of the above criteria.

The program has a series of learning experiences starting with theoretical learning about rights, responsibility and their role in community development, and the skills to map issues and assets in the locality.

There are practical learning opportunities to investigate communities, interact with residents to delve into community issues and assets and test their project ideas with decision-makers and authorities in the Town Hall Meeting.

The implementation of the local action projects presents an authentic challenge for the youth that encourages them to be consultative, work in teams and solve real-life problems.

Through these processes, the youths get first-hand experience in dealing with stakeholders, understand the complexities of issues, and gain the confidence to be part of a solution to a community issue.

The formation of the Town Hall Committee brings on board the key stakeholders who control the larger environment wherein youths learn to exercise their civic responsibilities and see themselves as powerful civic actors.



An analysis shows that Project Mikhung is similar to Project Citizen, a successful civic education programme implemented in 45 states in the US and other countries (Tolo, 1998). Project Citizen engages the youth in learning about the government and how to monitor and influence policies. The project follows a six-step process that enables young people to identify problems, research, and propose public policy proposals in a simulated public hearing. The last step is a reflection on their learning experience.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Both the programmes - Project Mikhung of BCMD and Project Citizen in the US incorporate experiential learning activities. Research on the effectiveness of the project found that 98 % of the teachers lauded Project Citizen as effective in teaching civic education. 90% of the students surveyed reported that the project helped them learn about problem-solving, public policies and policy development processes, and 78% agreed that it made them understand that they can change their communities (Tolo, 1998).

An evaluation of Project Mikhung found similar learning outcomes. A comparison of the level of civic knowledge in students at the two

pilot schools and a control school found limited knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of citizenship and democratic culture in all three schools. However, a difference between the control and the pilot schools was that the students at the pilot schools had a better understanding of active citizenship and participated more in school activities relative to control school students. The students from the pilot schools had a better understanding of how to contribute to democratic culture and promote citizenship as adults than the students in the control school (BCMD, 2020).

The youths involved in the project experienced a boost in their confidence and improved public speaking and interpersonal skills.

They became more aware of the issues in their community and how to be a part of a solution to community issues. In solving real-life problems, youth developed critical and analytical thinking and resource mobilisation skills (BCMD 2021).

In the case of the Town Committee members, they opened up to receiving critical comments from the youths. The Committee members moved from being defensive of their organisations to providing youth with information and guidance to try out project ideas. The formation of the Town Hall Committee made it easier to approach authorities and stakeholders in the community to study issues and implement



projects. Seeing the youths in community development projects, the residents became more appreciative of their potential to bring positive change to communities.

The formation of the Town Hall Committee was crucial for realising the goals of civic education. Through the town hall committee, the participants could gain access to local authorities and other agencies. It not only proved resourceful for the participants to gather information, insights and critical feedback on their proposals but eased the challenges of accessing information in the communities. The creation of the Town Hall Committee played a pivotal role in enriching the learning experience

of young people. It helped ease the bureaucratic resistance to young people investigating and initiating small projects as they learn and practise civic roles and responsibilities.

CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS

This section describes and discusses some of the findings from the monitoring and evaluation of Project Mikhung.

Time Constraint

While a series of activities, instead of a one-off learning event, deepens civic learning, the whole-school approach demands time and commitment from teachers and school management. One of the main challenges for the teachers involved in the project was competing priorities and not having sufficient time to carry out the series of activities with the same rigour as the training of trainers (step-down training and

community mapping). There was a dilution to the quality of learning sessions organised in the schools after the training of trainers.

Insufficient budget

Such an approach to civic education also demands resources as it involves multiple field visits to the communities with students. The schools tend to deprive the students of experiential learning experiences due to budget constraints. While schools can arrange for transportation for field work, in a true spirit of volunteerism, students can bring refreshments and make experiential learning possible.



Lack of support from the community

Some youths face challenges in interviewing as community residents tend to be busy with farm work. For schools interested in implementing an experiential approach to civic education, engaging local leaders (Mangmi or Tshogpa) from the beginning of the project may address this issue of not having support from the community.

Unrealistic project scope

In some instances, youths tend to be idealistic and pick projects beyond their capacity and time availability. Such incidents frustrate them, and they struggle to implement local action projects.

Teachers' guidance in choosing manageable and realistic project ideas is critical in ensuring an enriching and enjoyable learning experience.

Assessment

Another pitfall is mistaking project completion as the indicator of success rather than the learning outcomes in the students. The teachers should be clear about the learning outcomes right from the outset. While completion of the local action projects is desirable, it is a vehicle that takes the youths on a learning journey. It is of paramount importance for the teachers to guide the students to conceptualise manageable local action projects.

INTEGRATING WHOLE- SCHOOL APPROACH TO CIVIC EDUCATION INTO BHUTANESE SCHOOLS

Community vitality is one of the indicators of GNH-based education. Many schools have Socially Useful and Productive Work (SUPW) classes, Media and Democracy Clubs, Community based Scouts or Community Partnership or Social Service Units. Many of these clubs have the mandate to contribute to community development and present an opportunity to integrate the experiential approach to civic education.

BCMD's experiential approach to civic education takes learners into the communities and connects

them with real-life issues. It requires students to interact, consult and inquire about issues with actual administrators, local government officials and residents. The approach brings on board experts within the community to add to the richness of civic education. This approach absolves educators from being experts on all subject matters but demands creativity and conviction to make learning authentic and experiential.

One foreseeable challenge to an experiential approach to civic education is the buy-in of the stakeholders. Students need access to relevant agencies and information for their projects and collaboration with community residents to engage in joint



projects.

Should one decide on an experiential approach to civic learning for their students, it is best to orient the relevant stakeholders on the purpose of experiential learning. This orientation can be done through a quick session during the parent-teacher meeting or a letter of support through the district (Dzongkhag) administration when the students go on field visits to map communities and carry out local initiatives. Proper planning and collaboration with the local government and relevant agencies in the community are instrumental to organising successful experiential learning.

The approach also requires the

educators to have an in-depth and complex understanding of asset-based community mapping, project-based learning and research skills to guide the students well. An asset-based approach to community mapping provides a more complex lens for the students to discover strengths and issues in the community.

Resources on civic education can be accessed from <https://bcmd.bt/newsroom/publications/>, or you can write to bcmd@bcmd.bt.

CONCLUSION

Project Mikhung takes learning out of the classroom and into the community. The whole-school approach to civic education includes the students, teachers, community members and local authorities and makes civic learning experiential with field work and local action projects.

Motivation and support from teachers and education leaders are central to making the experiential learning process possible.



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