



# An Inquiry into Citizen Participation and Democratic Culture at the Local Level



Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy



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## Executive summary

Citizenship education is key to building active citizens that will contribute towards healthy growth of democratic institutions and democratic culture. Even in well-established democratic countries, citizenship education continues to be at the heart of their school curricula.

Bhutan's transition to a democratic constitutional monarchy took place in 2008, and Bhutanese citizens continue to learn about democracy itself and how to participate actively in democratic processes. Many Bhutanese are unaware of what democracy means beyond voting and the electoral process; people's role as citizens, to share views, the need to hold government and decision-makers accountable and influencing policies through various means elude people's knowledge and understanding.

This study will contribute to the generation of knowledge on issues of citizen participation to provide baseline information on citizen's understanding of citizenship, democracy and the practises of democratic ideals.

Studies have also shown that participation of citizens in democracy is a learned behaviour, and hence the need to initiate citizenship education (Alviar-Martin, Ho, Sim & Yap, 2012; O'Connor & Romer, 2006). This emphasises the need of countries such as Bhutan to strengthen citizenship education. Recognising this need, the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) has initiated a three-year citizenship education programme called the Project *Mi-Khung* (citizen) in Paro in collaboration with Paro *Dzongkhag* (district) administration and two pilot schools. The Project *Mi-Khung* was aimed at promoting citizen's participation and democratic culture at local level. The goal is to nurture an inclusive and participatory approach to planning and decision making at the local town level.

The project comprises the district/urban administration, and two high schools. It follows a whole school approach to citizen education that involves teachers, schools and members of the community. As part of the project, a Town Committee headed by *Dasho Dzongda* (district administrator) is constituted with representatives from the civil service, civil society, local government, and the communities. Various intervention programmes have been implemented to support students, teachers, community members to learn more about citizenship and democratic culture through hands-on experiences.

This study is to measure the citizen's level of civic knowledge, understanding of their roles and responsibilities in a democracy, and also to understand citizen's participation and democratic culture. A combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (sequential) were employed to arrive at a more holistic understanding of the situation and to provide some baseline against which to measure and assess future developments and changes. Students and teachers of the two project schools, Paro Town Committee members, and community members were the key stakeholders involved in this study. However, another school (control school) that was not a part of the project was selected to collect comparative data using the same tools.

## Key findings

Overall, the study found that students perceive minimal active participation and democratic culture in their school context. This is an indication of the need for relevant stakeholders to support students and community members to improve their knowledge and understanding of citizenship and democratic culture. Some of the key findings are presented below:

- On civic knowledge, it was found that students from both control and project schools have limited knowledge of the rights and responsibilities as citizens of a democracy. The level of understanding of democracy and democratic culture in the schools is basic and rudimentary. However, students are aware of the necessity to participate in democratic processes. They are also ready to volunteer, obey laws and know that they should vote for the right people but feel that they are not consulted on matters relevant to them.
- Regarding the social media, students believe that the information they get from the social media is instantaneous, while the mainstream media is delayed by hours and sometimes by days. They also believe that the social media is more reliable as the information is often backed by evidence.
- Findings on current election practise conveys a strong message that adults need to take special note of. This study revealed that youths are observant and reflect on what is going on in the country. They are critical about the current practise of voting for friends or relatives in local and national elections.
- Findings from this study reaffirms the importance of voting for the right people to form a strong government. The students categorically pointed out that every candidate must be critically studied by looking at their track records.
- Students of the project schools revealed much deeper understanding in terms of what kind of person is a good citizen, active participation in school life, their understanding of what they learn in school (curriculum), the kinds of media they use to keep abreast of things happening around (political action), and their expectations of what they will do when they are adults (political action) compared to their counterparts in the control school.
- An interesting finding on gender was that female students discussed more about politics and governance with their peers, family members, and teachers compared to their male counterparts. While the exact reasons cannot be determined from the findings of this study, it is worth exploring further in future.

## Recommendations

The study concludes with a list of recommendations to relevant stakeholders. The first recommendation from this study, which will be of interest to the Ministry of Education (MoE), Royal Education Council (REC) and the schools, is to strengthen active participation and democratic culture in schools. This can be done by introducing more hands-on citizenship education experiences such as identifying issues in the community and coming up with creative solutions rather than just theoretical knowledge of citizen participation. For instance, the current BCMD initiative of students mapping their communities to identify issues and solutions to problems is a good example of hands-on experience. Besides helping the community solve their problems, students learn important citizenship and democratic values such as asking questions, investigating issues, decision making, leadership, supporting each other, and participation that are often not addressed through classroom teaching and learning.

Second, relevant stakeholders such as the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB), other government and non-governmental agencies such as the BCMD are recommended to provide workshops and training on civic knowledge among civil servants and local leaders to strengthen understanding of their roles and responsibilities in a democratic setting. Currently these stakeholders are doubtful of their own roles and responsibilities which creates disharmony and mis-understanding amongst them.

Third, teacher education colleges are recommended to include aspects of citizenship education in their programmes. The study recommends training to promote participation of citizens and democratic culture in their teaching and learning processes besides focusing only on their subject content. As practised currently, if everything is being controlled by the teachers, students are likely to grow up to be passive listeners and followers which will not be of much help in their adult life.

Finally, a section with a list of recommendations dedicated to future research. The study recommends reviewing civics curriculum to ascertain adequate lessons on democracy, to observe civics classes to get a deeper understanding of the classroom environment, to observe democratic processes in schools, gender differences in terms of student perceptions of Bhutan's politics and governance, and to study the ethnic background differences in terms of personal views about politics, democracy, and the role of government and citizens.

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction



A student of Drukgyel Central School shares her understanding of citizenship at the Town Hall Meeting in Paro.

## 1.1 Rationale

While Bhutan transitioned into a constitutional democratic form of government in 2008, evidences of democracy can be traced back to as early as 1950s when the Third Druk Gyalpo His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck introduced various systems and processes such as the *Tshogdu* (National Assembly) that gave decision-making powers to the people (Curriculum and Professional Support Division [CAPSD], 1997, 2013; Pommaret, 1997; Phuntsho, 2013). These initiatives were further reinforced by the visionary Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck through decentralisation of more powers to the local governments. All these facilitated greater involvement of the people in decision making and prepared them to embrace a democratic form of government in 2008. Today, His Majesty the King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, constantly reminds people to promote the ideals and principles of democracy through promotion of democratic culture, active participation, and being responsible citizens (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019).

In many countries, the ideals and principles of democracy are promoted through formal citizenship education in the schools (Dean, 2005; Schulz, Ainley, Losito, Agrusti & Friedman, 2016; Sears & Hughes, 1996; Sim, 2012). Citizenship education is crucial for building active citizens, ensuring well-functioning democratic institutions, nurturing responsible citizenship, and contributes to nation building. Active participation of citizens is key to a healthy democracy and research has shown that it is a learned behaviour (Alviar- Martin, Ho, Sim & Yap, 2012; O'Connor & Romer, 2006) and must be taught to the children from a young age. Kemp and Jiménez (2013, p.14) argue that “active citizens at the local, national and international levels that can ensure well-functioning democratic institutions, processes and practises, and the key to building active citizens is exclusively citizenship education.”

However, there is adequate evidence to show that citizenship education is not adequately addressed in the education system in the world today including Bhutan (Wangmo, 2016). A recent Doctorate (PhD) study concluded that the Bhutanese civics curriculum lacked citizenship content and identified issues such as teacher preparation, delivery, and textbook (Wangmo, 2016). At an international level, Kennedy and Paul (1998 as cited in Lourdes, 2002) espoused the need for radical change in citizenship curricula stating that the world needs nothing less than a total “re-education of humankind” (pp.1-2). Such a powerful statement on the need to rethink citizenship education calls for a timely intervention. Bhutan is no exception. Considering that democracy is new to the Bhutanese, it is plausible that there could be concerns and issues related to the application of democratic principles in the governance of the country. A few research studies have shown that there are both systemic flaws as well as gaps in people’s understanding of democratic culture and active participation (HELVETAS, n.d.; Wangmo, 2016), which needs to be addressed.

Recognising the need, BMCD has initiated a three-year citizenship education project called the Project *Mi-Khung* in collaboration with Paro *Dzongkhag* administration and two pilot schools. The main aim of the project is to promote citizen’s participation and

democratic culture at the community level. It mainly aims to nurture an inclusive and participatory approach to planning and decision-making at the local level. The project follows an experiential approach to citizenship education and targets both citizens and duty-bearers (elected leaders and bureaucracy). The project members included class IX students and few teachers from the two pilot schools. As a part of the project, a Town Committee was set up headed by the Paro *Dzongda* with a few representatives of civil servants, local leaders, community members, and civil society organisations (CSOs).

While there is a lack of empirical data in the Bhutanese context, anecdotal evidence shows that students, community members, and Bhutanese population in general are yet to fully understand how citizenship and democratic values manifest in daily lives. Perhaps it could be, amongst other things, due to the recent transition into a democratic system of government, and the fact that the culture of democracy is evolving in a society that is just learning about democracy.

To address the gaps and lay the foundation for a democratic society, BCMD initiated the Project *Mi-Khung* based on an earlier experiment with community mapping. The project models an experiential approach to citizenship education with a component of teaching citizens to investigate social issues in their communities, and then to experience simple civic action through small local initiatives.

This study will establish a baseline data on citizen's understanding of citizenship (roles and duties), democracy and the practices of democratic skills. The study will help identify gaps in knowledge, attitude (values) and practices of citizen's participation (quality of citizen participation in public deliberation and decision-making). The baseline evidence would enable BCMD to strengthen its efforts and guide the project as it progresses and track its impact in addition to providing useful data to relevant stakeholders to design intervention programmes.

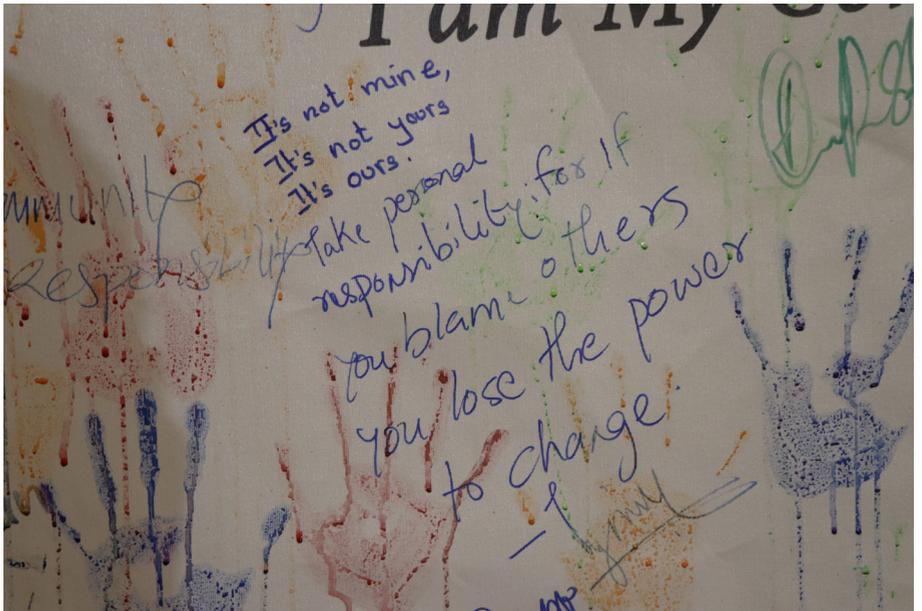
## Objectives

The research aimed to:

- Inform programmatic development and intervention to enhance citizens' participation and democratic culture at the local level;
- Establish a baseline data on citizens' understanding of citizenship (roles and duties), democracy, and practices of democratic ideals;
- Identify gaps in the current state of citizen's understanding of knowledge, attitude (values) and practices (quality of citizen participation in public deliberation and decision-making) of citizens' political and civic participation; and
- Identify the characteristics of citizens' participation at the community level that contributes to the deepening of democracy.

# CHAPTER 2

## Literature review



Reflections from the participants during the launch of Paro Town Vision and Mission.

## 2.1 Foundations of Bhutanese democracy: From an era of chieftainship to democracy

The formal system of administration dates back to the time of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel in the 17th century. Zhabdrung unified Bhutan and established *chösi nyiden*, the dual system of government where *chö* or the spiritual affairs was managed by the Je Khenpo, the Chief Abbot and the temporal affairs by the Desi, the temporal ruler. This system of theocratic rule saw about fifty-four *Desis* rule the country from 1651 to 1907 before the people of Bhutan unanimously elected Gongsu Ugyen Wangchuck as the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan on 17 December 1907 (CAPSD, 1997, 2013; Pommaret, 1997; Phuntsho, 2013; Tobgye, n.d.; the National Council [NC] and Helvetas, 2016). The First Druk Gyalpo, His Majesty the King Ugyen Wangchuck established the monarchy while the Second Druk Gyalpo, His Majesty the King Jigme Wangchuck, consolidated the fragile Kingdom.

In less than half a century of the establishment of monarchy, the far-sighted and visionary Third Druk Gyalpo His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck planted the seeds of democracy. He established *Tshogdu*, the National Assembly in 1953 with 150 members, of which 105 were elected representatives of the people, 12 from the monk-body, and 33 nominated from the government. This served as a platform for the people to express their concerns through their elected representatives. This was followed by the establishment of a nine-member *Lodroe Tshogde*, the Royal Advisory Council in 1965. The nine-members consisted of six representatives of the people, two representatives of the monk-body, and one nominee of the King. In 1968, the King established a modern judiciary with codified laws and the highest Court of Appeal – the High Court with the King assuming the final power of decision (CAPSD, 1997, 2013; Pommaret, 1997; Phuntsho, 2013; Tobgye, n.d; NC and HELVETAS, 2016).

The Fourth Druk Gyalpo His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck further accelerated the pace of democratisation by decentralising the power from the central to the local government. His Majesty the Great Fourth established the *Dzongkhag Yargye Tshogdu* (Dzongkhag Development Committee) in 1981 and *Gewog Yargye Tshogchung* (Block Development Committee) in 1991 (CAPSD, 1997, 2007). This move facilitated greater involvement of the people in decision-making and prepared them for democracy. The final steps leading towards the 2008 democratic elections were the dissolution of the Cabinet in 1998 and election of the Council of Ministers vested with full executive powers by the people's representatives. This was followed by the formation of the Constitution Drafting Committee in 2001 under Royal command, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's declaration of the abdication of throne in 2006, and His Majesty the King's assumption of office to take care of the state's affairs while the formal ascension to the throne took place only in 2008 (CAPSD, 1997, 2013; Pommaret, 1997; Phuntsho, 2013; Tobgye, n.d; NC & HELVETAS, 2016).

Since 2008, Bhutan saw three political parties take the helm of affairs beginning with Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) in 2008 followed by People's Democratic Party (PDP)

## Milestones in the evolution of democracy in Bhutan.



*“The King reasoned that democracy must be introduced during peaceful times and that the country should not be entrusted in the hands of just one person (the King) not knowing the capability of future heirs.”*

Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck

in 2013 and Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) in 2018. Bhutan also witnessed two local government elections in 2011 and 2016 (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019). The foundations of Bhutanese democracy may be summed up in His Majesty the King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck’s address to the first Parliament in 2008, “The highest achievement of one hundred years of Monarchy has been the constant nurturing of democracy” (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019, p. 16).

## **2.2 Gift from the Throne or a responsibility: Democracy through Bhutanese lens**

The birth of democracy in Bhutan “*does not comply with conventional democratic transition theories*” (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019, p.16) where a critical mass of citizens with “heightened political consciousness” (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019, p.16) demand democracy. Therefore, to understand democracy in Bhutan, it is pertinent to know that the democratic system in Bhutan was driven and initiated by the throne in contrast to other democracies of the world.

In 2006, when the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced that he will abdicate the throne and parliamentary elections will be conducted, the emotionally charged Bhutanese masses pleaded against it. They claimed that change was not needed since Bhutan had political stability, peace and progressive economic development under the monarchy. His Majesty the Fourth King reasoned that democracy must be introduced during peaceful times and that the country should not be entrusted in the hands of just one person (the King) not knowing the capability of future heirs (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019, pp. 22-23).

Rooted in this rationale, the Bhutanese extol democracy in Bhutan as unique – and even after a decade of parliamentary elections, many people continue to recognise Bhutanese democracy as a “Gift from the Golden Throne”. This emotion of gratitude is evident in the baseline survey administered as part of this report to 119 students, where 17.6% of the students studying civics reported that “Democracy is a Gift from the Druk Gyalpo”. Similarly, a Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy conducted by the Parliament of Bhutan and UNDP (2019, p.14) indicated that more than one-fourth (29.8%) of the Bhutanese expressed the same view.

While the popular conception of democracy as “a Gift from the Golden Throne” continues to linger in the minds of the people, there are other variations. The baseline survey conducted for this report revealed that almost two-fifth (38.7%) of the student respondents opted to choose “*Democracy is shouldering of responsibility by all the people*”, followed by more than one-fifth (22.7%) for “Democracy is voting and elections” and close to one-fifth (19.3%) for “*Democracy is decentralisation of power and governance by people*”. The other definitions of democracy reported in the Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy conducted by the Parliament of Bhutan and UNDP (2019, p.14) showed almost one-fourth (24.6%) of the Bhutanese respondents

seeing democracy as “Governance by people”, followed by one-sixth (15.5%) for “*Democracy is decentralisation of power*”, followed closely by 15.2% for “*Democracy is voting and election*” and 14.9% for “*Democracy is responsibility*” (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019, p.14). Sithey and Dorji (2009) in their book ‘Drukyul Decides: In the Minds of Bhutan’s First Voters’ presents 17 different definitions of democracy. Some of them are “change; power; choice; responsibility; people’s welfare; freedom; power given by King; change from old to new; more schools, hospitals and electrification; election of ministers; among others” (p. 81).

His Majesty the King on several occasions indicated his vision and aspirations for Bhutanese democracy. A year before the first parliamentary election, during the 87th session of the National Assembly on 7th June 2007, His Majesty’s address stated: *The spirit of democracy must be a part of one’s life at home with one’s family, in the community, at work and in the government. It is not a word to be used for politics alone. It depends not on the form of government but on the principles, integrity and values of the individual* (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019, p. 52).

Similarly, during the National Graduates’ Orientation Programme on 24th October 2007, His Majesty shared:

*Now, if we want our democratic system to work, if we want a democracy that will fulfill the aspirations of our people, then we must take the next step – we must adopt the ideals and principles of democracy. We must build a democratic culture. This period when democracy takes root is a slow process. It takes time. But this process is crucial for the ultimate success of democracy in our country* (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019, p. 25).



Students of Shaba Higher Secondary School carry materials to their Local Action Project site at Kesa in Shaba, Paro.

*“The spirit of democracy must be a part of one’s life at home with one’s family, in the community, at work and in the government. It is not a word to be used for politics alone. It depends not on the form of government but on the principles, integrity and values of the individual.”*

His Majesty the King

During the 2013 National Day celebrations, His Majesty addressed the Nation on the need to change the perspective and understanding of democracy in Bhutan as follows:

*I have seen many people describe democracy as a jewel gifted to the people from the Throne. I would say that rather than a gift, democracy is the responsibility given to the people to further strengthen the country... (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019, p. 26).*

The quintessence of the excerpts from the Royal addresses provide a basis to structure a concept of Bhutanese democracy. The profundity of the Royal addresses envisage a democratic system where the mindset of the Bhutanese people should shift from the idea of democracy as a “Gift from the Golden Throne” to one where citizens share the responsibility of strengthening the country to achieve greater heights. The leaders of Bhutan envisioned an empowered citizenry in a vibrant democracy as described in the following excerpt from His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo’s address to the Parliament in 2016:

*The King, country, and people of Bhutan have a common aspiration for our democracy – we aspire for a democracy with rule of law, democracy with unity, democracy with integrity, democracy with talent and meritocracy, democracy that is responsible, and democracy that serves to create a just and harmonious society, we will truly have a people’s democracy. (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019. Royal Address to the 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the Second Parliament in July 2016, p. 25)*

With these visionary aspirations from the Golden Throne, three rounds of parliamentary and two rounds of local government elections, and numerous programmes and activities, it is likely that the people’s understanding and perceptions of democracy especially in the context of Bhutan would have improved. However, due to lack of research it is difficult to understand if there has been any shift in the conception of democracy and whether citizens are contributing to democratic culture. What do students and community people think of democracy? Are they able to promote democratic culture and be responsible citizens? These were some of the questions this study was designed to find out.

### **2.3 An engaged citizenry: Seeds for a healthy democratic culture**

The citizenship discussions of Heater (1999) and Kymlicka (2002), Sim, Chua and Krishnasamy (2016, p.93) state that “*in modern times, citizenship is cast along two contrasting perspectives*” which are the classical liberal tradition and the civic republican tradition. The classical liberal tradition<sup>1</sup> is premised on the right of participation guaranteed to the citizens by the state whereby the citizens can decide to be active or not. From this perspective, a person may choose whether to participate actively or not, and can also choose to ignore the duties of a citizen. In contrast, the civic republican tradition<sup>2</sup>

expects the active participation of the citizens in decision-making and political life. The citizen's collective action for the good of society are emphasised in this tradition, and thus the need for active participation in the public/political sphere.

Existing literature indicates that citizens are also expected to engage themselves for the common good and identify themselves with the larger national culture (Sim, Chua & Krishnasamy, 2016). Further, morality is instrumental for this tradition and it is perceived as “*giving one's service to, and fulfilling one's duties in the political community*” (Sim, Chua & Krishnasamy, 2016, p. 93).

Towards which of the two perspectives does citizenship in Bhutan lean? Or does Bhutan have a different model? To understand Bhutan's citizenship stance, it is necessary to refer to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan and other relevant documents.

The Fourth Druk Gyalpo, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck said, “*destiny lies in the hands of the people*” (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019, p. 28). These words of wisdom may be interpreted as a command to the Bhutanese citizens to be engaged and responsible citizens to deepen democracy and propel economic development and progress to new heights. Therefore, the Bhutanese populace should harness the opportunities created by democracy and engage themselves to “*strengthen sovereignty of Bhutan, to secure the blessings of liberty, to ensure justice and tranquility and to enhance the unity, happiness and well-being of the people for all time*” (Preamble, Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008), that culminates into a good democratic culture.

Article 9, clause 20 of the Principles of State Policy of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan states that “*The State shall strive to create conditions that will enable the true and sustainable development of a good and compassionate society rooted in Buddhist ethos and universal human values*” (2008, p. 18). Bhutan's Constitution also creates an enabling condition for the citizens to be engaged in a democratic setting by stating that “*power and authority shall be decentralised and devolved to elected Local Governments to facilitate the direct participation of the people in the development and management of their own social, economic, and environmental well-being*” (Article 22, Clause 1, 2008, p. 42).

*“Citizenship refers to the relationship between the individual and the state as well as among individuals. Most conceptions of citizenship contain a few key elements – participation in public life; that a citizen is one who both governs and is governed; a sense of identity; acceptance of societal values; and rights and responsibilities.”*

Faulks, 2000; Sim, 2012

These extracts from the Constitution describe ideal Bhutanese citizens as those who are engaged for the collective well-being pronounced in the ideals of serving the *Tsa Wa Sum* (the three roots) which are the king, people and the country. Underlying this relationship is the belief in *tha-damtsi* (sacred commitment) and *ley-judrey* (cause and effect); for instance a good leadership or system of governance together with an engaged citizenry would result in a democratic culture that promotes a “*good and compassionate society*”

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<sup>1</sup> Notable liberal individuals whose ideas contributed to classical liberalism include John Locke, Jean-Baptiste Say, Thomas Robert Malthus and David Ricardo.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Britannica encyclopaedia, as an approach to governance, the principal ideals of civic republicanism can be traced back to the ancient works of Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, and Cicero, among others.

as enshrined in the Constitution (Article 9, clause 20, p.18). Another perspective is illustrated by Wright (1962, p. 1), as cited by Wangmo (2016, p. 16-17) that “If we accept the privilege of, for instance, freedom of speech, then we must exercise a sense of responsibility in choosing what we speak about and when and how to speak and respect the same freedom for others.” Faulks (2000) and Sim (2012, p.197) provide more insights into the notion of citizenship: “Citizenship refers to the relationship between the individual and the state as well as among individuals. Most conceptions of citizenship contain a few key elements – participation in public life; that a citizen is one who both governs and is governed; a sense of identity; acceptance of societal values; and rights and responsibilities.”

Drawing from the preceding discussions, it may be concluded that the Bhutanese idea of citizenship is woven around the Buddhist fundamental values of *ley-judrey* and *tha-damtsi*, and the expectation of the citizens is to be engaged citizens who contribute to carving a good democratic culture. The Bhutanese concept of a citizenship model driven by the notions of *ley-judrey* and *tha-damtsi* aligns closely with the western citizenship concept of the civic republican tradition. Therefore, the expectations of engaged Bhutanese citizens that the republican tradition describes is well captured by BCMD’s (n.d.) definition that an engaged citizen will be consciously involved in:

*Verifying information on issues of concern, remaining connected with their community, exercising rights with duties, expressing views and opinions on issues of concern, holding representatives accountable, and taking action to address the issues. (p. 9)*

Alviar-Martin, Ho, Sim and Yap (2012) assert that citizenship engagement in public life such as recognising issues, proposing and critiquing solutions and responding to social problems is vital for deepening democracy and for the well-being of a democratic society. Bhutanese citizens have witnessed three Parliamentary and two local government elections. Foundations for democracy to grow and enabling conditions for citizens to be engaged have been laid. The best examples of the need to engage citizens were demonstrated by the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck when he established an inclusive and participatory process in preparing the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan. His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo engaged the public by entrusting the task of drafting the Constitution through a committee representing various sectors and regions of the country. In addition, the draft Constitution was discussed with the people of all 20 *dzongkhags*, ministries and as many stakeholders as possible. The draft Constitution was translated and read in three dialects, namely *Dzongkha*, *Tshangla* and *Lhotshamkha* (Tobgye, n.d., p.21) manifesting inclusivity of all the citizens in the finalisation of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan. The Preamble of the Constitution also manifests the profound idea of inclusiveness and collectiveness of the Bhutanese society as it begins with the proclamation “*We the people of Bhutan...*”. This, according to former Chief Justice Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye is “*representing the collective will of the Bhutanese people and symbolising that the source of power emerges from the people*” (n.d., p. 22).

Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye said that it was during the first parliamentary debate when some Members of the Parliament expressed the need to establish a clear hierarchy with the Speaker of the Parliament controlling *Dzongkhag Tshogdu* (DT), *Gewog Tshogde* (GT) and *Thromde Tshogde* (municipality), that of the post of the *Dzongda* as an appointed post was also contested. However,

*His Majesty the [Fourth Druk Gyalpo] acknowledged to Parliament that there had been some concerns on the administrative structure and functions of Local Governments. The Constitution had, therefore, made a provision for Parliament to regulate the powers and functions of the Dzongda and Local Governments to ensure that they would be self-reliant and self-sustaining. Parliament thus ultimately understood that having an elected Dzongda was not required and could overly politicise Local Government to the detriment of effective consistent performance. (n.d., p. 22)*

Another milestone to encourage citizenship engagement was manifested by His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo on 17 December 2016 by awarding 22 CSOs the National Order of Merit (Gold) medal for contributing to a wide array of services such as “livelihood support, care-giving, gender equality, media, governance, the environment, animal welfare and poverty alleviation” (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019, p. 87).

Virtual *Zomdue* (meeting) is yet another case of investment and an effort to engage all levels of citizens in decision-making. First prototyped in 2014, virtual *Zomdue* is an initiative of the Parliament of Bhutan in collaboration with UNDP to take the tradition of *Zomdue* to a virtual platform through a network of digitally connected community centres around the country. The virtual *Zomdue* is yet to reach all the *Gewogs* (blocks) and has not made any large-scale, visible impact mainly because of the absence of advocacy, telecommunications network fluctuations and lack of clear guidelines but has a high potential to engage citizens in decision-making (Dorji, 2017). The most recent pathway envisaged by His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo is the *Gyalsung* (National Service), planned to launch by 2022. This wise initiative will nurture the Bhutanese youth to assume greater responsibilities as engaged citizens with the aptitude to make decisions and the attitude to serve the country.

In these examples, we see the aspirations of Bhutan’s visionary monarch for its citizens to be responsible and to participate in public life to deepen democracy. Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy by the Parliament of Bhutan and UNDP in 2019 reported that a vast majority (87.25%) of the respondents perceive that democracy has prepared them “*to be more responsible*” (p. 22). While it will be a gross generalisation to draw conclusions based on a single study, it is tempting to say that this perception expressed by the people probably stems from a sense of greater citizenship engagement that people are experiencing in democratic Bhutan, inspired by the benevolent monarchs.

The democratic culture of Bhutan has prepared grounds to enable citizenship engagement in public life. Now, it largely depends on the Bhutanese citizens to be inspired to participate in strengthening democracy. However, teething issues of a nascent democracy was observed mainly related to community participation and decision-making processes. The Local Governance Assessment Study prepared for the NC of Bhutan highlights that the community members are happy with the public services that the central and the local government provide. The report points to a weak social contract between the Local Governments and the citizens and suggests strengthening through continuous awareness, dialogue and social accountability processes in place NC & Helvetas, 2016).

The highest representation of community members is during the annual participatory planning process which happens at *chiwog* (sub-block) level. However, the report shares that “*some Gups (block headman) expressed concern about the lack of active citizenry to take part in such important spaces for planning and for state-citizen dialogue*” (NC & Helvetas, 2016, p. 13). There is also a low level of active women and youth participation even when their physical representation is high during public meetings (NC & Helvetas, 2016, p.14). When it comes to the decision-making process, the report states that the Standing Committees that are empowered to make rules were not established by many *dzongkhags* and *Gewogs*. The study also found that there were no financial committees to analyse and track the usage of grants, revenue and other incomes of local governments (NC & Helvetas, 2016, p. 19), among several other issues. Of the many recommendations made by the report, the ones which are relevant to citizenship engagement are development of a consolidated National Decentralisation Policy; development of a Decentralisation Implementation Plan; initiate citizens’ empowerment programmes; formulate administrative instructions for coordination and feedback; and formulate administrative instructions to enrich DT/ GT decision-making structures and processes (NC & Helvetas, 2016, p. 64-67). Similar observations and recommendations were also made in the report, Assessment Study on *Dzongkhag Tshogdu* and *Gewog Tshogde* of the Department of Local Governance (DLG) carried out by HELVETAS Bhutan (Department of Local Governance [DLG], n.d.).

## 2.4 Preparing an educated and enlightened society: Civics education in Bhutan



Students of Shari HSS take stock of findings from the community mapping exercise.

According to the MoE, the vision of education for Bhutanese children is to be “... *an educated and enlightened society of ‘gyalyong gakid pelzom*”<sup>3</sup> *at peace with itself, at peace with the world built and sustained by the idealism and the creative enterprise of our citizens*” (MoE: 2012, p.i). This noble aspiration to prepare an ‘educated and enlightened society’ is supported by several policy statements of which two are highly relevant to civics and citizenship as outlined below:

<sup>3</sup> The idea of Gross National Happiness or GNH, Bhutan’s development paradigm that focuses on prioritising people’s well-being in any development.

*All schools shall promote core values and facilitate productive and critical engagement in society as active and informed citizens. To this end, schools shall teach the country's spiritual and cultural heritage throughout schooling and develop civic, financial, entrepreneurial, environmental, media literacy, and provide life skills education programmes. (MoE, Draft Policy statement 7.6: n.d., p. 5).*

What is vivid in the vision and the policy statements is that the goal of education is to prepare school graduates who are responsible and engaged citizens. However, due to lack of empirical evidence, it has been difficult to ascertain if students have been responsible and engaged.

Outside the framework of the mainstream literacy and numeracy subjects, the MoE introduced Values Education in the early 1990s and Educating for Gross National Happiness in 2010 (Sherab, 2013). The essence of both the programmes is to prepare citizens who understand, values, and practice the fundamental Buddhist values of *tha-damtsi* and *ley-judrey*. Both these programmes aimed to groom school children into good human beings who are responsible, trustworthy and exhibit high levels of integrity, among many other values. However, unlike Values Education, which was taught as a separate subject, Educating for Gross National Happiness is infused in all subjects as well as the management of the schools and its physical setting. Further, Educating for Gross National Happiness also contained the principles of Child Friendly School (CFS) so that children will enjoy going to school. The portrait of a GNH graduate is reflected in Figure 1.

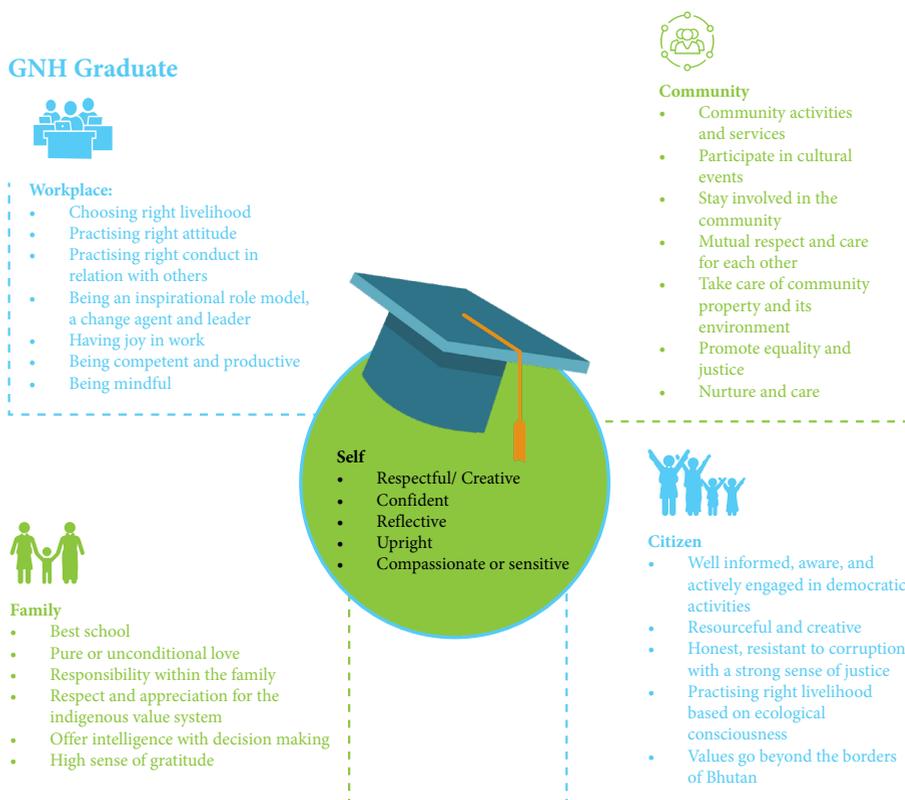


Figure 1: A customised portrait of a GNH Graduate (Source: DCRD, n.d., p. 44)

*“All schools shall promote core values and facilitate productive and critical engagement in society as active and informed citizens. To this end, schools shall teach the country’s spiritual and cultural heritage throughout schooling and develop civic, financial, entrepreneurial, environmental, media literacy, and provide life skills education programmes.”*

Draft National Education Policy.

The portrait of a GNH graduate covers two very important components which are directly linked to the concept of engaged citizenship. They are the parameters of community and citizen. In the community parameter, the expectation from a GNH graduate is for the persons to participate in community activities and services, engage in cultural activities, show mutual respect and care for one another in the community, take care of community properties and promote equality and justice in the community. The citizen parameter expects GNH graduates to be well-informed and actively engaged in the democratic process, resourceful and creative, un-corrupt with a strong sense of justice, practice right livelihood based on ecological consciousness, and values beyond the borders of Bhutan (Department of Curriculum Research and Development, n.d., p. 44). Thus, the aspirations of the Bhutanese education to nurture children to play roles of engaged and responsible citizens corroborates with Dean’s (2005) view of education as preparation of young people for their role as citizens. Therefore, civics and citizenship are also windows towards achieving the goal of education to prepare an engaged citizenry with an aptitude and attitude to participate in building a good democratic culture. In this regard, Wangmo (2016) emphasises that for future citizens to be active participants in nation-building, subjects such as civics and citizenship should be provided high priority in the school curriculum.

The history of civics education in Bhutan is interesting. Till 1998, in the absence of Bhutanese civics, the Bhutanese children studied Indian civics. From 1999, Bhutan had written its civics textbook that was taught in classes IX and X. The topics covered were mainly the three arms of the government namely the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary and some history. The textbook did not have any topics on democracy and the roles of citizens. Then, in 2006, as a step to educate people on democracy, the MoE developed textbooks for classes VII to XII. According to Wangmo (2016, p. 81) *“the development of the civics curriculum of 2006 was primarily aimed at building strong foundations for democracy by educating citizens to participate meaningfully in the political process”* of the first ever parliamentary election in 2008. The contents of the textbooks primarily revolved around the role and engagement of citizens in the election and the importance of exercising political franchise of voting. The other forms of citizenship engagement in public life such as recognising issues, proposing and critiquing solutions and responding to social problems (Alviar-Martin, Ho, Sim & Yap, 2012) were not seen in these textbooks. On similar lines, the ECB, (2013) states that:

*Civic and citizenship education typically comprise three main elements. The teaching of/towards: civic knowledge, civic disposition (values), and civic skills – i.e. to enable them to acquire the knowledge and skills essential for informed, effective citizenship. Civic education is a continual process, not tied to the electoral cycle. Voter information and electoral education, however, may be part of larger civic education endeavour. Civic education may be carried out through the school and university system, through civil society organisations, and perhaps by some state agencies, although not necessarily the election authority. (2013, p. 2)*

Grounded in the ideas proposed by Mellor (2003) and Henderson (2013), Wangmo (2016, p. 15) asserts “*civics is the study of democracy, its history, traditions, structures and process, while citizenship is the development of skills, attitudes, beliefs and values that will support students to participate and become engaged in society.*” Wangmo (2016) reported that the existing textbooks in the Bhutanese schools provided civics education but had nothing on citizenship education. The lack of focus and emphasis on citizenship education in the existing school curriculum has been underscored by the ECB as follows:

*Civics has been taught as a subject in the school curriculum for a number of years with focus on learning about the different institutions of governance, the powers and roles of the state authorities, and the roles and responsibilities of individual citizens. However, civic education could now encompass active learning and engagement in the future Bhutanese citizenry who would take part in the democratic governance of the country. (2013, p. 2)*

Thus, if the purpose of education is to cultivate the grace of the mind, offering citizenship education is the key towards achieving this aspiration. Several studies indicate that citizenship education is an inadequately addressed aspect of education in the world today including Bhutan (Wangmo, 2016). A recent study concluded that the Bhutanese civics curriculum lacked citizenship content and there were issues related to teacher preparedness, delivery, and textbook (Wangmo, 2016). Advocating for a radical change in citizenship curricula, Kennedy and Paul (1998 as cited in Lourdes, 2002, p.1-2) alleged that “*we need nothing less than a total re-education of humankind*”. Numerous studies have confirmed that a healthy democracy requires active participation of citizens, and citizens have to be nurtured and prepared to become responsible individuals (O’Connor & Romer, 2006). It is those active citizens at the local, national and international levels that can ensure well-functioning democratic institutions, processes and practises, and the key to building active citizens is exclusively citizenship education (Kemp & Jiménez, 2013, p.14).

Realising the importance of citizenship education for Bhutanese children, the ECB (2013, p.3) introduced democracy clubs in the schools and educational institutions with the objectives to:

*Educate and inform on the electoral process; develop and prepare future citizens in the world of a democratic system and values such as political tolerance that would guide appropriate choices and determine behavior and attitude; and sustain the positive trends to support democracy.*

Further, the Bhutan Children's Parliament (BCP) was initiated to provide a platform for student democracy clubs to come together. The "Constitution" of the BCP encourages students to learn about the roles and responsibilities of citizens in nation-building and sustaining democracy. However, the centralised national "sitting" of the BCP involves high costs for bringing teachers and students to the capital. Therefore, a review by the MoE recommended that BCP be decentralised to the district level to enable more student participation. Suggestions have also been made to engage students in studying democracy rather than imitation of the mechanics of parliamentary sessions (Pek-Dorji, 2018, pp.75-76). Unfortunately, the tertiary education institutions, for instance, the two college of education, that can advance civics and citizenship education have not been proactive in responding to this need. Instead, they have been preparing history and civics teachers based on the current history and civics textbooks. Also, the Definitive Programme Documents of Bachelor of Arts in History and Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Sociology offered in a few colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) also reveal that Civics and Citizenship education has not received much attention, as there is not even a single module or unit of study that addresses the need for citizenship education.

However, the MoE has realised the need to integrate the essence of civics and citizenship education in the current civics textbooks. In light of this realisation, the REC has already reviewed the existing civics textbooks and developed a framework to guide the new textbook development. The revised civic textbook will now be called "Civics and Citizenship Education Textbook" and not Civics Textbook with a more specific focus and emphasis on citizenship engagement so that the students will be inspired to participate in public life to make decisions and to contribute to nation building thus deepening democratic culture. The new textbook is tentatively scheduled to be introduced in 2021 in Class VII, followed by one higher level of class each subsequent year till it reaches Class XII (Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with Officers of REC on 26 October 2019 in REC Office, Paro). Such reform efforts answer the need of the time and align well with the values enshrined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

## **2.5 Citizenship education project of BCMD: creating a baseline data**

A democratic form of government is a relatively young concept in Bhutan and while many Bhutanese are aware of the democratic institutions, there is still some ignorance of what democracy is, and how to participate in this form of governance apart from the act of voting in elections. The average person's understanding of democracy is

limited to voting and electoral campaigns, of Parliamentary sessions, and the work of constitutional agencies. Holding elected leaders and the government to account, influencing decisions and policies through providing feedback and taking simple action to address local community needs as a duty of a citizen are less understood.

Although Bhutan is a fairly young democracy that transitioned from absolute monarchy in 2008, there is evidence of some initiatives being made to deepen the democratic institution and processes in Bhutan. The ECB and the DLG have carried out some voter education training, but citizen education is limited. In the last few years, BCMD has carried out a number of initiatives to educate Bhutanese citizens ranging from youth to teachers, local government representatives and women. Activities range from publishing guides for teachers to support and inspire the youth to be smart consumers of news and media messages to organising platforms for discourses on citizenship. Efforts have also been made to include youth and adults, and civil society members through initiatives such as Project *Mi-Khung*, inspiring community-based change, and civic education. Project *Mi-Khung* aims to nurture an inclusive and participatory approach to planning and decision-making at the community level. This is done by strengthening citizen's social awareness, and to enable community participation to provide community services in collaboration with local agencies and leaders to create a more democratic culture in the community. This study will provide the baseline data needed to strengthen and improve on the project for future replication.

BCMD has also produced and published two manuals – one to inspire active citizenship and the other to support youths to be smart news consumers. The publications have reached schools, institutes and communities, and government offices. BCMD has also produced other print and audio-visual resources on media and democracy. BCMD has also trained and provided youths with community mapping skills and enabled them to implement projects in their communities. At the national level, BCMD has organised forums for political leaders to come together and engage in political discourses opened to a cross section of Bhutanese society and trained government officers at the *Gewog* level as well as women interested in local elections.

Therefore, BCMD's intervention through Project *Mi-Khung* in two schools in Paro *Dzongkhag* is timely. It is important to upscale this initiative to establish a nationwide baseline data of citizen's participation and democratic culture so that stakeholders such as the Parliament, MoE, ECB, local governments and other relevant stakeholders can use the findings and recommendations to design intervention plans to build a good democratic culture as set out in the Constitution through the initiatives of an engaged citizenry.

## **2.6 Defining active citizenship and democratic culture**

The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy describes citizenship as “membership in a political community<sup>4</sup>”, where the citizen enjoys the rights and assumes the duties of membership (Oldfield, 1998; Barbalet, 1999; Isin & Wood, 1999; Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2006).

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<sup>4</sup>In this case, reference to a political community does not refer to political parties.

BCMD has defined democracy as more than the act of voting, predicating it upon the ability of citizens to take on duties and action required for a just society, and not only for the individual. BCMD's mission is to contribute to a culture of democracy through civic engagement, public discourse and media-literate citizens. A culture of democracy is generally recognised as being inclusive, participatory, transparent, accountable, open, consultative, equitable and just.

BCMD has also designed and developed activities for citizen education over the years. Its publication, *Being a Good Citizen*, uses a metaphorical mandala that intertwines five key elements which BCMD has used in activities to further the understanding of democracy in Bhutan's context. These elements are: Interdependence and Harmony, Respect for Diversity, Equality and Equity, Integrity and Courage.

## **2.7 Research goal**

The study will establish a baseline data on people's understanding of citizenship (roles and duties), on democracy and the practises of democratic values. The study will help identify gaps in knowledge, attitude (values) and practises in terms of citizen's participation in society.

BCMD will undertake another study at the end of Project *Mi-Khung* to evaluate the impacts of the intervention. The current study explored the following research questions to establish the baseline data.

## **2.8 Research questions**

This research explored the following questions:

- What is the level of class IX students' civic knowledge (understanding of democracy, citizenship and their rights and responsibilities)?
- What is the high school students' understanding of democracy, citizenship and their rights and responsibilities?
- What is the quality and level of citizens' (teachers and students) participation in their community (school/town/village) affairs?

# CHAPTER 3

## Methodology



Students of Jigme Namgyel Engineering College construct toilet at Dudjom Dharma House, Dewathang, Samdrup Jongkhar

### 3.1 Research approach

This study is part of the citizenship education (Project *Mi-Khung*) project that BCMD has initiated in Paro *Dzongkhag*. The study aimed to measure the citizen's understanding of their roles and responsibilities and participation in a democracy and the practices of democratic culture. A combination of both qualitative and quantitative approach was employed to arrive at a more holistic understanding of the situation. The study used a sequential mixed methods design (Cooksey & McDonald, 2011; Creswell, 2009). The study began with a quantitative survey followed by qualitative data collection. All Class IX students (n=55) and teachers (n=21) who were part of Project *Mi-Khung*, Paro Town Committee members, and community members (who were the project members) by default were selected for this study. A group of 64 class IX students from a comparable public school from the same district also took part in the study serving as a control group.

### 3.2 Data collection tools and participants

In the first phase, data were mainly gathered through a self-administered survey questionnaire (see Appendix 1) for students using an adapted version of the Singapore citizenship education survey (J. B.-Y. Sim, personal communication, October 23, 2019). The survey consisted of 12 parts (Part A-L). Part A was for demographic information (gender, age, type of school, and ambition etc.) and Part B consisted of some test items on civic knowledge. Part C to L were all four-point likert type items that measured student perceptions of democracy, good citizens, government, our country, political system, school, school curriculum, political action 1, political action 2, and about classroom respectively.

A census self-administered survey (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) was employed to collect data from students involved in the project from the two pilot project schools and one control school. Based on the survey findings, FGD guides (see Appendix 2) were developed. In the second phase, FGDs were conducted with project school students (n=2) who were identified with the help of the project focal teacher in the respective schools, teachers (n=2), town committee (n=1), and community stakeholders (n=4) of the Project *Mi-Khung* and with students of control school (n=1) for more in-depth information. Other than the students, all other FGD participants were selected based on their willingness and availability to participate. Key informant interview (KII, n=2) was also used as a tool to collect qualitative data with the chairperson of Paro DT and the NC member. The two key informants were selected using the purposeful sampling method.

### 3.3 Research ethics

Prior to the commencement of the study, formal consent was sought from the Paro *Dzongkhag* Administration. Each of the FGD and KII participants were requested to sign a consent form. FGDs and KIIs were conducted either in English or *Dzongkha* based on the interviewee's preference. The participants' identity is protected through use of pseudonyms and no confidential details is shared in this report. The survey data and interview transcripts were stored securely and made available only to the researchers and BCMD.

# CHAPTER 4

## Data analysis and interpretation



Students of Shaba HSS interact with community residents at Shaba during community mapping.

## 4.1 Research context

This study adopted a sequential mixed methods approach where survey questionnaires were first administered and analysed to get the general feeling of students' perceptions of citizen's participation and democratic culture at the local level. The findings from the survey were used to develop the FGD and KII tools. A total of ten FGDs (three with students, one with local leaders, two with teachers, two with communities, one with REC officials, and one with town committee members) were conducted. KIIs were also conducted with a NC member and the chairperson of DT.

The open-ended comments in the survey questionnaire were also gathered to enrich qualitative data. FGDs and KIIs were conducted to get an in-depth understanding of people's participation in the newly established democratic set-up. The emerging themes and recurring messages from qualitative data were merged and triangulated with the analysis of quantitative data that are presented in this report.

## 4.2 Data analysis and findings

The data were thoroughly screened to make sure that there were no wrong entries and abnormal distributions. Quantitative survey data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS v23. The analysis was categorised into four key areas: Demographic information for project schools and control school; comparison of students' performance on Test of Civic Knowledge; Theme-wise Comparison of Mean and Standard Deviation, and Independent samples t-test to compare students' understanding of active citizenship; and democratic culture in terms of different demographic variables. The survey questionnaire consisted of five demographic items; 14 items that tested civic knowledge; and 116 items on other 10 themes (democracy, good citizens, our country, government, political system, school, school curriculum, political action 1, political action 2, and classroom). All themes were measured using four-point likert type items. Each of these themes/scales also provided a don't know/does not apply option. All don't know/does not apply options were treated as discrete missing values. Accordingly, the results of the study are presented in the following sections.

For the qualitative data, a thematic analysis was employed to make meanings out of the FGD and KII data. Findings from the survey and focus group data were triangulated to generate meaningful responses to the research questions posed for this study.

### 4.2.1 Demographic information analysis

The demographic information of the 119 participants from the project schools (n=55) and control school (n=64) are presented in Table 1. There were more girl respondents compared to the boys. Quite interestingly, there is a wide age range (13-19) of students in the same class level (Class IX). A majority of the respondents were day students and were *Ngalops* (people from the western Bhutan). Bhutanese students' ambition is something that is always interesting to be noted. Irrespective of their ability and the context of the current job market, most wanted to be medical doctors and military officers but none identified politics as an ambition. Most interestingly, there are also a good number of students who seem to prefer teaching (20% in the project schools and 7.8% in the control school). Perhaps future research could explore possible reasons for students' ambitions

Table 1: Demographic information of participants (n= 119)

Characteristic	Category	Project schools- (n=55) (DCS(25) & SHSS (30))		Control school (n=64)	
		No. of respondent	%*	No. of respondent	%*
Gender	Girl	31	56.4	41	64.1
	Boy	24	43.6	23	35.9
Age	13	-	-	4	6.3
	14	6	10.9	22	34.4
	15	12	21.8	23	35.9
	16	15	27.3	11	17.2
	17	16	29.1	1	1.6
	18	5	9.1	1	1.6
	19	1	1.8	2	3.1
School type	Boarder	9	16.4	-	-
	Day scholar	46	83.6	64	100
Ethnic background	Ngalop	38	69.1	39	60.9
	Tshangla/Sharchop	8	14.5	13	14.5
	Lhotshampa	5	9.1	8	12.5
	Others	4	7.2	4	6.3
Ambition	Doctor	15	27.2	15	23.5
	Teacher	11	20.0	5	7.8
	Police/army officer	11	20.0	8	12.5
	Lawyer	-	-	5	7.8
	Business	4	7.3	-	-
	Others (ordinary army, footballer, air hostess, chef, coach, engineer, manager, nurse, prosecutor, singer, tour guide, pilot, rapper, actress, air hostess, You Tuber)	12	23.4	23	36.8
* Percentage column do not add up to 100 due to missing values					

#### 4.2.2 Comparison of students' performance on test of civic knowledge

The civic knowledge test was administered to 119 students comprising 55 students from the project schools and 64 students from the control school. The civic knowledge test had 14 items structured in objective type format where the students had to choose the right response from the four options provided. The items ranged from general questions on definition of democracy and active citizens to specific ones that required the students to identify the name of the DT (see Table 2 for results and Annexure 1 for detailed analysis).

Table 2: Significance test and analysis of responses to civic knowledge test (findings in percentage)

Sl. No.	Assessment indicator	Project school	Control school	Average of each item	Sig. (T-Test)
1	Which one is the best definition of democracy in your view? (had to choose relevant definition)	20.4	19	19.3	.257
2	Three of these statements are opinions and one is a fact. Which of the following is a fact? (tested understanding of rights and duties)	34	39.1	36.1	.355
3	The head of DT is (had to choose correct designation)	37	25.8	30.3	.845
4	An active citizen is someone who (had to choose relevant definition)	67.3	75	71.4	.244
5	Three of the statements define a good democratic culture while one does not. Choose the statement that does not define a good democratic culture?	51.9	64.5	57.1	.869
6	Which of the following is not an accurate statement about media?	67.3	73.4	70.6	.920
7	Which of the following is an accurate statement about laws?	50.9	46.9	48.7	.225
8	Which of the following is a political right? The right ...	83.3	65.6	73.1	.416
9	A woman who has a young child is interviewed for a job at a hotel. Which of the following is an example of discrimination? She does not get the job because ...	47.3	31.7	38.7	.121
10	In democratic countries, what is the function of having more than one political party?	67.3	54.7	60.5	.088
11	In a democratic political system, which of the following ought to govern the country?	24.1	23.4	23.5	.182
12	Which of the following is most likely to cause a government to be called non- democratic?	29.1	21.9	25.2	.161
13	Three of these statements are facts and one is an opinion. Which of the following is an opinion?	25.9	23.4	24.4	.052
14	Three of these statements are opinions and one is a fact. Which of the following is a fact?	22.2	28.1	25.2	.079
	Average of 14 items	44.9	42.3	43.2	

\*Note: Total may not add to 100% due to missing values.

The analysis of the test results of the project and control schools showed that students' knowledge of civics is only 'fair'. The verbal rating of 'fair' is associated with the rating of the Bhutan Council for School Examination and Assessment (BCSEA) where someone who has just passed by scoring 40% and below 50% is considered as 'fair'. The other higher levels of verbal rating are 'satisfactory', 'good' and 'very good' in a progressive manner.

The verbal rating of 'fair' is illustrated by the consolidated average of only 43.2% of the students responding correctly to 14 items. The score is higher than the pass mark of the schools in Bhutan (40%) by just 3.2%. Specifically, the average percentage of 14 items of the project school is 44.9% while that of control school is 42.3%.

By item, the lowest average of project and control schools was for the item "Which one is the best definition of democracy in your view?" (test item 1). Only 19.3% responded correctly to the item. Even when disaggregated by project and control schools, this item had the lowest number of students who responded correctly with just 20.4% for project school and 19% for the control school indicating that students have a very limited understanding of what democracy means.

On the other hand, the average of project and control schools showed that item "Which of the following is a political right? The right ..." (test item 8) had the highest percentage (73.1%) of students who answered correctly. When disaggregated, the highest percentage of students of project school (83.3%) also responded to the same item correctly, while it was "An active citizen is someone who..." (test item 4) with 75% for the control school whose students did not have any exposure to the concept of active citizen shared under Project *Mi-Khung*.

The item wise comparison of the test results of the project and control schools showed that the students of the project school performed better than the control school in 9 test items, which was 64.3%. On the other hand, the control school performed better than the project school in 5 test items, which was 35.7% and they are items 2, 4, 5, 6, and 14. The difference in performance between the two groups of respondents was below 8% in 9 items while in 5 items, it was higher than 11%. They are test items 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10. The highest difference with 17% was for test item 8, which tested the understanding of political right, where 83.3% of the project school students responded correctly as compared to 65.6% by control school students. The average difference in 9 items where the project school performed better was 8.1% while in the 5 items where the control school did better was only 7.5%. However, the difference between the control and project schools on various items are statistically not significant.

Both the project and control schools had performed better in responding to item 3 which required the students to choose an option that defined an active citizen; item 6 on identifying an accurate statement about media; and item 8 on choosing the correct statement which defined a political right. These findings are complemented by the qualitative data gathered through FGDs from both the control school and project as the perspectives shared by the respondents highlight broad understanding of the notion of active citizens, political rights and media. For instance, a respondent (FGD3, Std2) from the control school expressed that a good citizen is one "who participates in each and every election." A few other students (FGD3, Std4 & Std5) from the same group expressed that it is not right on the part of the school management to not respect confidentiality. Similarly, students from project schools also shared that in a democratic setting, freedom of speech has to be respected and every citizen must participate in the democratic processes (FGD2, Std1 & Std2). Similarly, a

respondent from another project school shared that “transparency, collaboration and responsibility are key to democracy” (FGD1, Std5).

Grounded on the consolidated and disaggregated analysis of the civic knowledge test presented in the preceding sections, it can be concluded that:

- there is no significant difference between the project and control schools in their performance in all the 14 items as shown by the significance test results (see Appendix 3).
- civic knowledge of students of both project and control schools is ‘fair’ in spite of Bhutan Civics being taught in schools from classes VII onwards.

### 4.2.3 Theme-wise comparison of mean and standard deviation

A total of 10 themes consisting of 130 items: Democracy (22 items), Good Citizens (13 items), Government (10 items), Our Country (10 items), Political System (10 items), School (7 items), School Curriculum (8 items), Political Action 1 (11 items), Political Action 2 (8 items), and Classroom (9 items) were used to measure the student perceptions of citizen’s participation and democratic culture at the school and community level. The scores for each of the items under respective themes were aggregated to compute a mean score for each theme (see Table 3) using the SPSS software v23. The scores for all the negative statements (items) were reversed to make it positive.

Table 3: Theme-wise comparison of mean and standard deviation

Theme	Project Schools			Control School		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Part C- Democracy	55	2.91	.26	64	2.84	.25
Part D- Good citizens	55	3.62	.28	64	<b>3.53</b>	.20
Part E- Government	54	<b>2.73</b>	.26	64	2.80	.24
Part F- Our country	55	3.43	.31	64	3.47	.26
Part G- Political System:						
- in the Government	55	3.12	.42	62	3.13	.38
- Personal view on politics	55	2.90	.46	64	2.75	.44
Part H- School	55	3.40	.40	64	3.23	.37
Part I- School curriculum	55	<b>3.57</b>	.32	64	3.43	.33
Part J- Political Action 1:						
-Bhutan politics	54	2.85	.55	64	2.80	.55
-International politics	53	2.86	.61	62	2.65	.67
-Media	55	2.83	.55	64	<b>2.62</b>	.46
Part K- Political Action 2:						
-Adult expectation	55	3.03	.52	64	2.84	.47
-Student expectation	55	3.16	.63	63	2.94	.57
Part L- Classroom:						
-Students	55	2.74	.61	64	2.80	.55
-Teachers	54	3.05	.59	64	3.04	.48

As shown in Table 3, the highest and the lowest means for the project schools were 3.57 (Curriculum theme) and 2.73 (Government theme) respectively. For the control school, the highest mean was 3.53 (good citizens theme) and the lowest was 2.62 (political action- media theme). For a four-point likert type scale, the lowest of 2.62 was an average score. Thus, none of the scores were below average and a quick glance at the mean scores and standard deviations do not show much difference between the project and control schools. However, a good number of scores were just above average to good category, indicating that students' perceptions of democracy and citizenship at the local level needs improvement. In the next section, we provide a closer look at each of the 10 themes.

### 4.2.3.1 Democracy

Student perceptions of democracy were measured with a 22-item questionnaire, with four-point likert type scale ranging from very bad for democracy (1), somewhat bad for democracy (2), somewhat good for democracy (3) to very good for democracy (4). The scale also provided a don't know/does not apply option. The questions try to ascertain students' perception on scenarios that would show students' understanding of democracy and democratic practices such as the characteristics of democratic governance. Some examples of the questions include: 'When everyone has the right to express their opinions freely, that is...' and 'when differences in income and wealth between the rich and the poor are small, that is...'. The means for both the project ( $M=2.91$ ;  $SD=.26$ ) and control ( $M=2.84$ ;  $SD=.25$ ) schools were below three, which is good for a four-point scale. This is an indication that students' knowledge of democracy and their democratic rights and responsibilities is just above average to good.



Teacher participants prepare to present the findings from their mapping exercise.

### **Student involvement in decision-making yet to take roots**

A vital fabric of a good democratic culture is active participation of the people in decision-making. However, the FGD with the identified students revealed that student participation in decision-making is yet to take roots. This is evidenced when a student respondent from a control group stated “*We are not involved in decision making. Consulted only to implement decisions.*” The essence of this statement was also echoed by other students of both control and project schools. The teacher respondents of the control and project schools also shared similar views. How relevant is this situation to other schools? Should schools be the bedrock for deepening good democratic culture?

It is safe to surmise that there is ample room to enhance student’s understanding of democracy and for schools to provide that space for manifestation of democratic practices. For instance, they need to show understanding that democracy gives them the right to freedom of speech, opinion and expression. They need to understand that it is unfair if critics are restricted from speaking in public just because they do not agree with people in power. The respondents also seem to doubt if fairness is important in democracy. Hence, they do not completely believe that it is unacceptable for politicians to influence the government to give jobs to their family members. Students are also not completely aware that controlling the press is undemocratic, and that the media should be free of influence of any organisation to be able to inform people with unbiased and verified information. They also need to be educated that the government cannot set restrictions on private business arbitrarily. The analyses of the findings also indicate the students’ need to understand that politicians, civil servants and people in power should not influence the judiciary. Low standard deviation for both project and control schools showed that all students have similar views about democracy, indicating that they need to improve their understanding of democracy.

Qualitative data gathered through FGDs from students and teachers in the area of knowledge and participation under the theme democracy brings to light an intriguing difference. Responses from the project schools were more critical than the ones from the control group. The students from the control school shared general information about having participated in voting for their school captain, and about how they use their class teachers and school counsellor to communicate on their behalf to the school management. On the contrary, FGD data gathered from project schools showed that students have a heightened awareness about participation in school affairs. These students seemed confident about the need to be consulted to encourage their participation when schools make decisions that affect them. According to Std1 (FGD1), “we hardly get involved in decision-making.” Another student from the same

FGD, (Std2) shared grievances about night studies being conducted in the dining hall that is supposedly congested. This respondent said “the student leaders wrote to the principal but nothing has been done till now.” This statement indicated the awareness of students to share feedback as a form of expression that is awaiting response from the school management.

Similarly, data gathered from FGD4 with teachers of one of the two project schools also corroborates the lack of student involvement in decision-making other than in a few informal and ad hoc school activities. A teacher respondent further reported on the hesitation and discomfort teachers felt in sharing their views in formal meetings in the school. One teacher respondent stated, “we can share our comments openly in informal platforms such as teachers’ WeChat group, but during formal meetings we hesitate to share views because we worry about consequences” (FGD4, Tr2). Another teacher respondent also shared that they “do not voice out anything for fear” (FGD5, Tr3). Such instances provide evidence of cultural practices that are not conducive to decision-making processes that are participative, inclusive and democratic thus risking the suppression of peoples’ voices. Having made the transition to democracy about 12 years ago, such findings point to the discomfort of Bhutanese in exercising their rights and duties. It shows a need to build a sense of agency in citizens to encourage them to speak openly, and to have the confidence that their critical views could have a positive impact on the system.

### **Voices raised but went unheard**

Raising voices to suggest alternate ways of doing things in a constructive manner is indispensable for society to grow. In this context, in one of the schools, studies were organised in the dining hall which was described as cramped. Students reported that they had very little space to move even their hands to write comfortably. Murmurs and noise became an annoyance to many students who were serious with their studies. The student leaders took up the matter and raised the issue to school management, and proposed alternatives to create a conducive learning environment. The School Management was informed and students waited in anticipation. Days turned to weeks, and weeks to months but there was no response from the school management. This made the student body unhappy. What message does silence convey? It is up to students’ speculation and may cause resentment and distrust to germinate in the absence of a transparent communication over issues that matter to the students.

### **Fear of being reprimanded blocks exercising of rights**

Theoretical knowledge of students on their rights was sound. They are fully aware that as good and responsible students, they should share their views on issues that concern them and the school at large. Unfortunately, the FGD expose that limited space for students to exercise their rights. A student respondent stated “*Students do have many views and suggestions to share but there are some teachers who take our feedback personally. Some teachers even scold us in public. This fear of being reprimanded openly stops students from exercising their rights to express ourselves.*” A democratic school environment seems far from reality. Perhaps it has to begin with teacher education with an emphasis on modeling democratic habits and actions rather than theoretical indoctrination of democratic values and practises.

In line with the findings of the students and teachers, community members also seem to have limited understanding of democracy and democratic culture. For instance, one of the community members revealed, “*being a farmer, we don’t know exactly how to define the quality and the characteristics of democracy but put simply, in a democracy people have the right to vote, choose their leader, and participate in decision-making*” (FGD, Drugyel Community). On the contrary, explaining how a democratic process is being followed at the *Gewog* level, one of the local leaders clarified that any decisions made at the *Gewog* level are done only after consultation with the people at the village level. This is an indication that some semblance of democratic practices do exists at the grassroots level. The local leaders also alleged that in the name of democracy, people misuse their rights and freedom of speech. For instance, “public claim for their rights and freedom of speech but they must know when, where, and how to use their freedom rather than raising unnecessary issues.” This remark highlights the tension between individuals and the common good of the community. Furthermore, local leaders pointed out that there are issues not only with the uneducated and illiterates in the villages but also with the educated population. There is some indication that various stakeholders such as the *Dzongkhag* administration, DLG, and elected local leaders must be clear in terms of their roles and responsibilities to avoid power conflict. The responses show the issues that can be further addressed in future activities be it in the school curricula or in BCMD’s on-going project. Local leaders suggest that citizenship and democratic culture must be taught to the citizens right from school days.

### 4.2.3.2 Good citizens

The section of the survey on Good citizens measures the students' understanding of the characteristics and values of a good citizen in a democracy. This section was measured with a 13-item questionnaire designed based on a four-point likert type scale ranging from not important (1), somewhat unimportant (2), somewhat important (3), to very important (4). The scale also provided a don't know option. Some examples of the statements in this theme were, 'An individual who is a good citizen obeys the law' and 'An individual who is a good citizen votes in every election.' As shown in Table 3, the mean for both project ( $M= 3.62$ ;  $SD= .28$ ) and control ( $M= 3.53$ ;  $SD= .20$ ) schools were slightly above 3.5. This suggests that students in general from both control and project schools understand that citizens should obey laws, vote in every election, vote for capable candidates, know the country's history, are willing to join voluntary groups, and show respect for government leaders. These students indicated their willingness to provide voluntary services and participate in activities in communities to benefit people. They showed a tendency to be more sensitive to society's needs, to engage in activities to preserve the environment, follow political issues on media, and engage in political discussions. The answers demonstrate respect for laws and human rights. All students were consistent with their views as shown by low standard deviations.

Qualitative data gathered through FGDs and KIIs show that the knowledge on citizenship does not correspond to their behaviour in democratic processes. Student and teacher participants, especially from project schools, showed that they were fully aware of the roles and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic country. Yet, it is apparent that they were not able to exercise their democratic rights because of the fear of perceived consequences. Traditionally, as a hierarchical society, people tend to accord a lot of deference to their seniors and those in positions of authority.



A teacher participant talks to a vegetable vendor during community mapping.

This finding shows that though Bhutan has transitioned to a democratic form of government, democratic practises have not seeped into the institutional practises of the schools – an indication that those in leadership positions may be in need of professional development in democratic leadership and translating democratic principles into school practises. Similarly, students and teachers will benefit from learning how to provide feedback and suggestions to school management to create a more participatory school environment.

The fear of reprisals in sharing contrary opinions was common amongst both teachers and students but differed slightly in the case of community members. It was evident that community people exercised their citizenry rights to the fullest. The concern especially among local leaders was “Bhutanese people are using their rights to the fullest, and at times even misusing their rights” (FGD6, Participant5). An example cited of people trying to misuse their rights was a case where local vendors claimed their right as a citizen to set up garment shops in and around the vegetable market where clothing shops are not usually permitted.

Paro Town Committee members shared that a good citizen is someone who thinks of a common cause such as waste management rather than thinking of individual benefits. They believed that when citizens act on a common cause, it would promote a sense of community and togetherness. They reiterated that “if everyone has the sense of belongingness, responsibility, and feeling of oneness then we are considered to be a good citizen” (FGD, Town Committee). One of the Town Committee members who was also looking after a youth organisation in Paro shared how his youth organisation carried out community services such as cleaning campaigns and other youth- related activities in collaboration with the local government. He believed that the Paro town has improved in many aspects as a result of such activities. Discussing the lack of citizenship and democratic values in students, the school curriculum officials confirmed that the new curriculum framework focused on integrated approach to values and citizenship education for classes Pre-Primary - III - which is being piloted - is expected to address issues related to citizenship and democratic culture in the future (REC, FGD).

### **4.2.3.3 Government**

Students’ understanding of the kinds of responsibilities the government should have was measured by a 10 item questionnaire using a four-point likert type scale ranging from definitely should be the government’s responsibility (1), probably should not be the government’s responsibility (2), probably should be the government’s responsibility (3), to definitely should be the governments’ responsibility (4). The scale also provided a don’t know option. Examples of the items of this theme include the following two statements: that the government should, ‘provide a basic health care for everyone’ and ‘reduce differences in income and wealth among people’. As shown in Table 3, the mean for both project (M= 2.73; SD= .26) and control (M= 2.80; SD= .24) schools were below three, which translates to close to ‘probably should be the government’s responsibility’. This is an indication that students’ understanding of the government’s roles and responsibilities in democratic process needs to be improved. Currently, students seem to understand that the government should endeavour to provide basic health care and education for its people and also work towards instilling in people good behaviour and a sense of commitment to the country. Students also know that the government is mandated to control pollution, work towards reducing the income

gap between the rich and poor, and guarantee peace and order in the country. They are also, to some extent, aware that it is not the government's responsibility to guarantee jobs for everyone who wants one, provide equal political opportunities to men and women, to keep prices of goods under control, and to promote good behaviour. Lower standard deviations showed that these youths are consistent in their perceptions about the responsibilities of the government.

Data gathered from FGDs on government's responsibilities shows varied responses. Student respondents appeared to worry more about peace and order in the society while community people expected the government to provide workshops and training on citizenship education, democracy, governance, and their roles and responsibilities in democracy. This indicates the reliance that community members place on government to prepare them for democracy. Students from both control and project schools clearly wanted the government to do something about the safety of people. Lango town was cited as an example where "fights, brawls and quarrels are a common sight among alcohol abusing youths" (FGD3, Std6; FGD1). These students also specified that the government should do something about Paro becoming an increasingly unsafe place for girls. On the other hand, teachers' expectations from the government focused on moral issues such as integrity, ethics, corruption, discrimination among others (FGD4). Teacher respondents also expressed "respecting the decision and taking the right decision" (FGD5) as an important responsibility the government must bear in mind.

Community people, however, did not see safety as a big issue although they acknowledged that it is good to work on it as well. They shared that they lack knowledge of how to participate in a democratic setting. A respondent in KI interview expressed that "either civil servants in *dzongkhags* are unaware of their changing roles

### **Educate the LG leaders, district administrators and the public on LG Act**

The clarity of roles and responsibilities appear to be an issue at the Local Government level. Many leaders at central and local level fail to see the roles and responsibilities of the local government functionaries resulting from the inability or unwillingness to shift from the old ways of doing things to the new practises. One classic example shared by some of the local government leaders was the DLG seeking approval from Haa *Dzongda* to attend the Haa DT. By the LG Act, the DLG should communicate to the DT *Thrizin* (chairperson). Similarly, many *Dzongdas* and sectoral heads are not clear on their roles and responsibilities during the DT. If this continues, good democratic culture will not deepen. Therefore, it is important to educate particularly the *Dzongkhag* and *Gewog* administration officials as well as the central agencies and general public on the LG Act.



Finance Minister Lyonpo Namgay Tshering signs a pledge during the Vision and Mission launch of Paro town.

in democracy or they are intentionally holding on to the decision-making power that they had prior to democracy” (K11). The respondents expect the government to educate not just the community people but also the civil servants on the changing roles in democracy.

Open-ended data gathered through survey questionnaires showed a strong indication for the need to vote for the right people in order to have a good government. The fact that at least one third of the open-ended responses directly or indirectly shared about the need to vote for capable people showed that good governance is at the heart of Bhutanese youths. One student recommended not to “vote for a corrupted candidate though he/she may be your relative” (Sch3, Res109). Another respondent cautioned, “never vote for the candidate who gives money and asks for a vote” (Sch3, Res101). The need to vote for the right people also featured strongly in FGDs with community members. These respondents also advised voters to “... vote for the right person who can look after the well-being of the people, community and country” (FGD7, Res1, 2, 4, 5, and 6). It is encouraging to note that students have an understanding that citizens’ active participation and democratic culture are crucial in having a strong and healthy government (Sch1, Res 20 & 23) and for smooth functioning of the government (Sch1, Res 17).

#### 4.2.3.4 Our country

How the students feel about ‘our country’ was measured by a 10 item, four-point likert type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), to strongly agree (4). The scale also provided a don’t know option. Some of the sample items in the questionnaire included ‘To help protect jobs in Bhutan, we should buy products made in Bhutan’ and ‘We should prevent other countries from trying to influence political

decisions in Bhutan.’ The means for both project (M= 3.43; SD= .31) and control (M= 3.47; SD= .26) schools were close to 3.5. This implied that students’ sense of patriotism, understanding of and respect for the country is high. In order to uphold the sovereignty of the country, students supported the need to prevent other countries from influencing our political decisions and be watchful of the external interference from other countries. Students tended to have high regard for the national anthem and national flag. They also supported the idea of promoting culture and tradition and promoting ‘Brand Bhutan’ to help in achieving self-reliance. Students’ perceptions of their country were consistent as shown by the low standard deviations.

Qualitative data collected for this theme showed all participants including teachers, students, community people, and local leaders having high regard for the country’s sovereignty and security. School community especially student participants stressed on patriotism while community people expressed strengthening the institution of democracy. On participating in democratic elections, all respondents felt the need to participate at all levels of elections in order to build a stronger democracy in Bhutan. Additionally, community people and student participants also shared the need to respect and uphold Bhutanese culture and tradition, respect laws, national identity and the environment. For instance, one of the students (Sch 3, Res 108) mentioned in the open-ended comment, “we should do our best for our country to bring peace and harmony. And also preserve our culture and environment”.

#### 4.2.3.5 Political system

This theme is further divided into two sub-themes: political system and government, and students’ personal views on politics. The sub-themes were measured by a total of 10 four-point likert type items ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), to strongly agree (4). The scale also provided a don’t know option. Political system and government had four items and students’ personal views on politics had six items for an answer.

#### **I cast my only vote for the wrong candidate**

It was time for captain elections. One student respondent shared that he did not know any candidate and did not know for whom to vote. He sought the advice of a senior student whom he knew closely. They voted for the same candidate who was elected the School Captain. When asked if he would vote for the same candidate given a chance, the response was “*I cast my only vote for the wrong candidate. Very often he was sick and when we needed him, he was either in the hospital or in bed.*” He went on to add that it was important to study the candidate properly so that the mass do not suffer.



Participants of community mapping interact with an elderly shopkeeper to understand issues in their locality.

### **i. Political system and government**

Some sample items within this theme were ‘The government cares a lot about what all of us think about laws’ and ‘The government is doing its best to find out what ordinary people want.’ The mean for both the project ( $M= 3.12$ ;  $SD= .42$ ) and control ( $M= 3.13$ ;  $SD= .38$ ) schools were slightly above three. This sub-theme measures the students’ perception of the performance of the elected government– how responsive, inclusive and democratic the government is. The student respondents believed that the government was open to suggestions and responded accordingly to help address the needs of the people. They agreed that the government was doing its best for the country and its people. Students also concurred that people feel free to discuss issues on politics and that their opinions are acknowledged. Students also felt that people understand political issues and are able to participate in all political matters. Students’ views about the political system and government were convergent as shown by low standard deviations.

Knowledge on the political system in the country among different categories of respondents appeared quite good. This is evidenced in both FGDs and KIIs records. Student respondents in both control school and project schools shared how they whole-heartedly participated in their school captain elections. They believed that the right people should assume leadership in order to represent the student body whenever decisions concerning students were made. Similarly, community respondents shared their happiness and satisfaction of their choices stating that the people they have voted for have performed well.

### **ii. Personal views on politics**

A couple of the sample items on this theme were, ‘I know more about politics than most people of my age’ and ‘In this country, people feel free to question the government.’ The means of both the project ( $M= 2.90$ ;  $SD= .46$ ) and control ( $M= 2.75$ ;  $SD= .44$ ) schools were below 3, which is close to the answer - agree. This suggests the students’

confidence in their capability to understand political issues of the country and their interest in politics. They felt that people are somewhat free to question the government. Students showed not very strong inclination to participate in all discussions relating to politics. Lower standard deviations suggest that these students have similar views about politics.

Qualitative data gathered through FGDs amongst students and teachers showed that democracy is a gift from the throne and they considered it as their sacred responsibility to nurture democracy in Bhutan. While probing further on how they work on strengthening democracy, student participants from both control and project schools shared about how they participated in their school elections. A student respondent from the control school shared that the Constitution of the country guarantees every Bhutanese citizen the right to freedom of speech. The student reported “I raise my voice when I feel that my opinion must be heard” (FGD3, Std7). Sharing their appreciation of being invited by the school management to join their teachers to discuss school issues, one student said, “I felt good when I saw teachers debating before taking any decisions. Therefore, more such opportunities should be created” (FGD1, Std3). Freedom of speech featured strongly in all FGDs when asked about their views on democracy. Teacher respondents also highlighted the need to raise one’s voice as an important feature of democracy. A teacher respondent described democracy as “a setting where people with power are open to criticisms, and where people can provide constructive feedback which will improve the system or help the system to perform well” (FGD4, Tr3).

#### **4.2.3.6 School**

Student participation in school life was measured by a seven item, four-point likert type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), to strongly agree (4). The scale also provided a don’t know option. Sample items included the following: ‘Electing student captains to suggest changes in how the school is run [how to solve school problems] makes schools better’ and ‘Lots of positive changes happen in this school when students work together’. The means for both the project ( $M=3.40$ ;  $SD=.40$ ) and control schools ( $M=3.23$ ;  $SD=.37$ ) were above three, which suggest that the student participants agree on the need for students to participate in school life and their attitudes towards electing a school captain. Electing school captains to represent their voices to bring about positive changes is at the centre of democratic process in schools. Student respondents believed in the strength of unity and knew that if they bring up their issues together in unity, their opinions will be respected rather than voicing opinions individually. Students also indicated non-tolerance if any of their friends were unfairly treated. Lower standard deviations indicated that students were consistent with their perceptions about participation in school life.

FGDs with students supported the survey findings. Students shared a number of instances in schools where they had participated in democratic processes. Election of captains, students taking a lead in organising cleaning campaigns and school concerts, providing written feedback on school management, and sharing opinions about school rules with class teachers and counsellors are some of the activities practised in schools. However, contrary to the quantitative data, student respondents from project schools indicated that they did not feel safe to share their views. For instance, one student shared a concern: “we only feel safe when we write and give feedback without writing

any name on the paper” (FGD2, Std6). Another respondent from the project school shared that the school management took their feedback but hardly responded to the feedback provided.

#### **4.2.3.7 School curriculum**

How schools prepare youth to be citizens in a democracy was measured in this section by asking what students learn in school. This was measured by an eight item, four-point likert type items ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), to strongly agree (4). The scale also provided a don't know option. Items under this theme to assess the role of school and its curricula in nurturing citizens to have respect for diverse views, to work in teams, to be patriotic and loyal, and to have the confidence to ask questions included the following statements: 'In school I have learned to understand people who have different ideas' and 'In school I have learned to cooperate (work together) in groups with other students.' The means for both the project ( $M= 3.57$ ;  $SD= .32$ ) and control schools ( $M= 3.43$ ;  $SD= .33$ ) were high indicating that students strongly agreed that they have learned to understand people who have different ideas, to cooperate in groups with other students, to contribute to solving problems in the community, to be a patriotic and loyal citizen, to protect the environment, to be concerned about what happens in other countries, the importance of voting in elections, and encouraged to ask questions. Their perceptions of school learning appeared to be consistent as shown by low standard deviations.

Qualitative data on school curriculum showed students' awareness that in principle, lessons on civic, history, and geography are supposed to be interactive, research-based, experiential learning through field trips and activities. However, responses from both control and project schools showed that in reality most of these do not happen. These students shared that lessons were often monotonous and boring. For instance, a student from a project school commented that their classes were “almost fully teacher-centred and lecture-based which is boring and dead” (FGD1, Std2). In lessons about current affairs, students from both control and project schools shared that such classes happen very rarely.

Interestingly, teacher respondents confirmed that their classes are not as democratic nor participatory as expected. They shared that they are forced to lecture because activity-based and field trip approaches are time consuming. They also shared that the syllabus is too vast and activities require more time (FGD4, FGD5). This indicates that the school curriculum is focused on theory and is perhaps too broad and does not provide adequate opportunities to prepare youth to translate democratic ideas into practice through exploration and real-life service learning.

#### **4.2.3.8 Political action - 1**

Students' political action is assessed through how frequently they engage in discourses on Bhutan's politics and governance, international politics and engagement with the media. This sub-section aimed to provide insights into students' understanding of politics, both national and international and through their media use. The theme was further divided into three sub-themes: Bhutan's politics and governance (3 items), International politics (3 items), and media and politics (5 items). It was measured by a total of 11 four-point likert type items ranging from never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), to often (4). The scale also provided a don't know option.

### **i. Bhutan's politics and governance**

The three items under this sub-theme asked students if they discussed Bhutan's politics and governance. Statements in the questionnaire included, 'How often do you have discussions of what is happening in Bhutan's politics and governance with - people of your own age (peers), parents or other family members, and teachers.' The means for both the project (M= 2.85; SD= .55) and control (M= 2.80; SD= .55) schools were below three, which suggests that these students do not discuss much about Bhutan's politics and governance with their peers, family members, and teachers. Students' reports did not vary widely from one another.

The findings from the qualitative data concurred with the quantitative data supporting the finding that student participants of both control and project schools did not actively engage in discussions about Bhutan's politics and governance. However, these students highlighted the need for citizens to participate actively in politics. Student respondents also shared, "citizen participation is a must to have a strong and healthy government" (Sch2, Res20).

### **ii. International politics**

The three items under this sub-theme explored whether students discussed international politics. A sample item asked: 'How often do you have discussions of what is happening in international politics with - people of your own age (peers), parents or other family members, teachers.' The means for both the project (M= 2.86; SD= .61) and control (M= 2.65; SD= .67) schools were below three indicating that these students do not discuss much about international politics with their peers, family members, and teachers. These findings were consistent across the majority of the students as indicated by the low standard deviation.

Analysis of qualitative data showed that teachers in project schools engage their students in discussions on international politics selectively on issues that they think may affect Bhutan's interest. The data revealed that discussions primarily centred on new developments in India and China and other neighboring countries that have relevance to Bhutan. Teachers in control schools also encouraged students to share interesting international issues. While students relied mostly on social media for their news and information, teachers teaching civics and history claimed that they regularly update themselves by watching CNN and BBC (FGD4 & FGD5).

In the FGD among town committee members, respondents shared the need to look at good examples from around the world and emulate their practices accordingly for Bhutan to succeed. Explaining this, one of the respondents in a FGD made the following statement: *"I really admire Switzerland. Swiss people have come up with a concept that can ensure their sovereignty and stability. All world leaders and politicians have their accounts at Swiss banks. We need to think like Swiss people"* (FGD6, Res2).

### **iii. Media**

The five items under this sub-theme measured how often these students read and listen to different media forms. Questions included: 'How often do you read articles (stories) in the newspaper about what is happening in Bhutan?' and 'How often do you listen to news broadcasts on television?' The means for both the project (M= 2.83; SD=

.55) and control ( $M= 2.62$ ;  $SD= .46$ ) schools were below three, which suggest that these students' scores were slightly above average. This is an indication that these students are not frequent readers of articles in newspapers or online about what is happening in Bhutan and other countries, and that they do not often listen to news broadcasts neither on television nor on radio. They were also consistent about their perceptions of the media.

Both the project as well as control school students claimed that they read news articles from Kuensel, The Bhutanese, and Telegraph. FGD showed that students from the control school relied mostly on television channels such as CNN, BBC, BBS, Aljazeera, and CGTN for information. On probing further, it was evident that FGD participants from the control school were day scholars, hence they had more time and opportunity to watch television while about half of the participants in the project schools were students from boarding schools. Their views about the media seemed to be consistent in both the cases.

However, students from both the groups shared that social media helped keep them informed about Bhutan on a regular basis. On probing whether they indicated that they trusted the accuracy of information in the social media which they said that they confirmed by looking up different media sources. When asked whether they followed the mainstream media such as Kuensel and BBS, they said that by the time they read the news in Kuensel, the news was stale. However, control school students said that they read Kuensel articles to verify whatever they have read in social media.

Discussing the importance of media, Town Committee members supported the idea of how media should be used to promote democracy. They added "Media needs to be very active and have transparency between the public and government. Media should be very objective, independent and lively in a democracy. Media should not be kept under control unless it is about international politics" (FGD, Town Committee).

#### **4.2.3.9 Political action - 2**

This next section assesses students' current and expected future involvement in political action. The theme was further divided into two sub-themes: adult expectation (5 items) and student expectation (3 items). It was measured by a total of eight four-point likert type items ranging from I will certainly not do this (1), I will probably not do this (2), I will probably do this (3), to I will certainly do this (4). The scale also provided a don't know option.

##### **i. Adult expectation**

The five statements under this theme were about students' perceptions of what political action they expect to take when they are adults. Sample statements included: 'Vote in national and local elections,' and 'Get information about candidates before voting in an election.' The mean for the project school ( $M= 3.03$ ;  $SD= .52$ ) was slightly above 3 while the control school's mean was below three (Mean= 2.84;  $SD= .47$ ). The project school students indicated greater intent to take political actions in the future compared to control school students. Political actions used as examples include voting in national and local elections, getting information about candidates before voting

in an election, joining a political party, writing letters to a newspaper about social or political concerns, and becoming a candidate for a local or city office. Students' perceptions about adult expectation were consistent across all participants.

Data collected through FGDs clearly showed the students' understanding of the importance to participate in elections and all other democratic processes. They also shared that every citizen must participate in elections as a responsible citizen. These student respondents asserted that adults should vote for those candidates who are capable with good leadership skills. The students emphasised that people should not vote for friends and relatives as it is happening currently (FGD2, FGD3 & Sch3-Res101).

## **ii. Student expectation**

The three items under this sub-theme measured students' perceptions about what political actions they, as students, could take during the next few years. The actions described include volunteer time to help/benefit the poor or people in their community, to collect money for a social cause, and to collect signatures for a petition. The mean for project schools ( $M=3.16$ ;  $SD= .63$ ) was slightly higher than the mean for the control school ( $M= 2.94$ ;  $SD= .57$ ). This is an indication that students from project schools have indicated slightly more intention to take on the suggested actions. The views of both the control and the project school students appear to be consistent.

Qualitative data gathered from students showed keen interest to engage in community services such as periodic cleaning campaigns, uprooting marijuana plants and organising events. Student respondents from both control and project schools shared their experiences of having engaged in community services. Student respondents from both the control and project schools showed keen interest in crowd sourcing for humanitarian reasons. However, qualitative findings confirm that students from project schools appeared to have provided more voluntary services such as building sheds, water reservoirs and footpaths (FGD1, FGD2 & FGD3) compared to their counterparts at the control school.

### **A will without enabler for action**

The Project *Mi-Khung* was one of the first experiences of many students to get engaged in voluntary services in the community. One of the students who participated in the focused group discussion stated that Project *Mi-Khung* opened their eyes on opportunities of contributing to the community. The other students also agreed with this point and supplemented by stating that such activities of engaging with the community give us experiences which also help us perform well in academics.

As of now, such engagement in the community is hardly initiated. One of the students shared that "*Interactions are only during ceremonies and celebrations when the local leaders are invited as guests.*" The students said that they have the will to volunteer but have been left out without an enabling driver. Now they are enabled by the knowledge and ideas received from Project *Mi-Khung* where many initiatives can be taken in collaboration with the community. This, according to the students, will contribute towards preparing them to grow into responsible and engaged citizens. Teacher participants also shared the same views as students.

As for the community members they responded that "*Till now we couldn't do any voluntary activities because our ideas are rejected at the Gewog administration level. This discourages us to take initiatives. However, we now know that even without Gewog's support, the community can initiate many activities on its own. We knew this from the project that we initiated with the school.*"



Students of Shari HSS repair an old drain in their campus.

#### 4.2.3.10 Classroom

This section explores how the classroom culture, mediated by the teacher, nurtures democratic values and attitudes through creating a free learning space where multiple and differing views are encouraged, solicited, and deliberated using current political and social issues. The questions asked students to reflect on things that happen in school that indicates a more participatory culture; students were asked to think about these issues in relation to classes in history, civics, values education, and social studies. The section was further divided into two sub-themes: students (4 items) and teachers (5 items). It was measured by a total of nine four-point likert type items ranging from never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), to often (4). The scale also provided a don't know option.

##### i. Student

The four items under this sub-theme measured students' perceptions of their own actions in the classroom. Respondents were asked the following: 'Students feel free to disagree openly with their teachers about political and social issues during class' and 'Students bring up current political events for discussion in the class.' The means for both the project ( $M= 2.74$ ;  $SD= .61$ ) and control ( $M= 2.80$ ;  $SD= .55$ ) schools were below three. This is an indication that these students do not feel free to disagree openly with their teachers about political and social issues during class, that they are not encouraged to have independent views about issues. It also indicates that students do not feel free to express their opinions in class when their opinions are different from most of the other students, and that they are not able to bring up current political events for discussion in class. These students have been consistent with their perceptions of what they can and cannot do in the classroom.

It is evident from FGDs conducted with students that teaching in subjects such as civics and history are more democratic compared to other subjects. They shared that during these subjects they have the opportunity to explore other sources and are given the opportunity to express their thoughts and views on issues. A student from the control school shared his experience when their teacher wanted to engage them in practicing what they learned in civics class. We formed four political parties, *Druk Gangri Tshokpa, Tsa-Wa-Sum, Druk Dranyam Tshokpa and One for Bhutan*. *"I was the President of the Tsa-Wa-Sum party. We campaigned among other students to support us. It is very difficult when we do it. It is not as easy as we think. But I enjoyed it and we all learned how difficult it is to convince other people"* (FGD3, Std2).

## **ii. Teacher**

The five items under this sub-theme measured students' perceptions of things that happen in the classroom in terms of their teachers' actions. Statements explored include, 'Teachers respect our opinions and encourage us to express them during class,' and 'Teachers present several sides of an issue when explaining it in class.' The means of both the project (M= 3.05; SD= .59) and control (M= 3.04; SD= .48) schools were just three. This is an indication that their teachers sometimes put in efforts to make their teaching as participatory as possible. For instance, teachers sometimes listen to students' opinions and encourage them to express themselves during class. Teachers who place importance on discussing issues rather than learning facts or dates, teachers encourage students to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions, and teachers present several sides of an issue when explaining. Students' views seem to be consistent across schools sampled.

Qualitative data on this from teacher respondents showed that they try to make their classes as interactive and democratic as possible, but cited the time constraints due to heavy teaching load and a bulky syllabus as a hindrance. This challenged their ability to make their teaching interactive (FGD4 Tr1).

### **4.2.4 Comparison of 10 themes with demographic characteristics**

A total of three independent sample t-tests were conducted to check if there were any differences in students' perceptions of 10 themes (democracy, good citizens, government, our country, political system, school, school curriculum, political action 1, political action 2, and classroom) as dependent variables and school, gender, and ethnic background as independent variables. Levene's test for equality of variances was found to be not significant ( $p > .05$ ) for the tests. Thus, the variances are approximately equal.

As shown in Table 4, in terms of school, four themes (good citizens, school curriculum, political action 1 - media, and political action 2 - adult expectation) showed significant differences, while gender and ethnic background showed significant differences only in political action 1 - Bhutan politics and political system - personal views respectively.



Teacher trainee participants prepare their presentations after mapping the community.

### **Constrained by resource, syllabus coverage and large student numbers**

Student-centred learning, project work, and field visits are instrumental to contextualise learning. Teachers are aware of this and even students enjoy these approaches. In this regard, some teachers shared that they try their best to create student-centred learning by giving project work and organising field work. However, there are constraining factors such as conveyance, large student numbers and syllabus to be covered. One teacher shared that “A curriculum thinning national level discussions took place sometime in 2017. Hopefully, the REC is working on curriculum thinning to facilitate more learning through engagement.”

Table 4: Independent samples t-test (only significant result) t-test for equality of means

Demographic characteristics	Survey theme	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Standard error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
							Lower	Upper
School	Good citizens	2.03	117	<.04	.090	.044	.002	.117
	School	2.41	117	<.01	.169	.070	.030	.308
	School curriculum	2.30	117	<.02	.138	.060	.019	.257
	Political action 1 -Media	2.29	117	<.02	.213	.093	.029	.396
	Political action 2 -Adult expectation	2.08	117	<.04	.190	.091	.010	.370
Gender	Political action 1 -Bhutan politics	2.65	116	<.01	.266	.100	.068	.465
Ethnic background	Political system -Personal views	2.09	111	<.04	.191	.091	.010	.372

Examination of the mean scores showed the following differences:

- In terms of the theme good citizens, the mean of the project schools (M= 3.62; SD= .28) was significantly higher than the mean of the control school (M= 3.53; SD=.20). This is an indication the Class IX students from the project schools have better understanding of what makes a good citizen while compared to their counterparts from the control school.
- In terms of the theme school, aimed at exploring student participation in school life, the mean of the project schools (M= 3.40; SD= .40) was significantly higher than the mean of the control school (M= 3.23; SD= .37). This suggests that Class IX students from project schools actively participate in school life and activities related to citizenship and democratic culture (such as the elections of a school captain etc.) compared to Class IX students of the control school.
- In terms of the theme school curriculum which set out to understand how the school prepares youth to be citizens in a democracy, the mean of the project schools (M= 3.57; SD= .32) was significantly higher than the mean of the control school (M= 3.43; SD= .33). This implies that Class IX students from the project schools have better understanding of what they learned in the school in terms of promoting citizenship and democratic culture.
- In terms of the section political action 1 - media, aimed at providing insights into students' understanding of politics, both national and international, and through their media use, the mean of the project schools (M= 2.83; SD= .55) was significantly higher than the mean of the control school (M= 2.62; SD= .46). These findings showed that Class IX students from the project schools engage more in reading articles online and in the newspaper, and refer to news broadcasts on television and radio compared with their counterparts in the control school.

- In terms of the political action 2 - adult expectation, aimed at learning about students' current and expected future involvement in political action, the mean of the project schools ( $M= 3.03$ ;  $SD= .52$ ) was significantly higher than the mean of the control school ( $M= 2.84$ ;  $SD= .47$ ). This is an indication that the Class IX students from the project schools have a better understanding of how they could contribute as an adult in promoting citizenship and democratic culture such as voting in elections, getting information about candidates before voting, joining a political party, be a candidate for local office, and be concerned about social and political issues compared to their counterparts at the control school.
- The theme political action 1 - Bhutan politics aimed at understanding how often, and with whom respondents would discuss Bhutanese politics and governance. Findings show that the mean of the female students ( $M= 2.93$ ;  $SD = .50$ ) was significantly higher than the mean of their male counterparts ( $M= 2.66$ ;  $SD= .59$ ). This suggests that female students of Class IX discuss more about Bhutan's politics and governance with their peers, family, and teachers compared to the students of the control school.

# CHAPTER 5

## Discussion and recommendations



A youth mapper from Menchhari, Orong Gewog, Samdrup Jongkhar shares his experience with the Paro Town Committee.

## 5.1 Discussion of key findings

As presented in the previous chapter, the overall student perceptions of citizen participation and democratic culture were slightly above average to good. There are plenty of opportunities for the relevant stakeholders to find ways and means to support students and community members to improve their knowledge and understanding. However, this study on citizen participation and democratic culture at the local, community-level presents insights on civic knowledge, understanding of democracy and democratic culture, participation in democratic process, resorting to social media for information and gender differences.

### 5.1.1 Students' civic knowledge

The study revealed that students from both control and the project schools in Paro have limited knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy. Students' overall average civic knowledge test score was just 43.3%. They have some theoretical knowledge that in a democracy, power is decentralised to people and governance of the people is by the people. Students are also aware that consultation is a central tenet of democracy and democratic processes of making decisions on issues that concern a community. However, based on the students' report such practices are yet to take roots in the school culture. One of the most important goals of education is the preparation of young people for their role as citizens. The problem, however, is that many countries do not give citizenship education the importance it deserves, nor uses appropriate approaches for the development of informed and participatory citizenship (Bernadette, 2005). The same can be said for Bhutan. The findings from this study corroborate the earlier findings of Wangmo (2016) that civics education in the Bhutanese education system lacks both content and practise of citizenship.

Findings showed that the students willingly participate when they are invited to discussions to help school management take decisions on school affairs, but when they are not consulted, they feel unsure if they should bring up the issue with the management. This could mean that there is a lack of understanding in schools as to how to interpret the democratic principles and put them into practise in a school setting. Citizenship education should make democracy work to achieve greater societal ideals – a more equitable and inclusive society where differences are acknowledged and respected, where decisions are based on consensus taking into consideration the needs and challenges of the minority, and where there is transparency and accountability. Schools are important places of socialisation and development where children learn about rights and duties, and where youth can be nurtured to become good citizens. Policies and practices need to be aligned. In the words of Sears and Hughes (1996), education's mandate "is to train citizens, in the widest sense of the term" (p. 134).

Students' lack of civic knowledge including the basic concept of democracy and lack of understanding about their rights and responsibilities is a concern that needs to be prioritised and addressed urgently because it will help strengthen democracy. Citizenship education is the only way to strengthen democracy by educating youths who are going to be future leaders. The new curriculum being developed by the REC on civics and citizenship education is timely and could potentially address the current gaps and issues. In countries around the world, students are already being equipped

with the skills on global citizenship (Sears & Hughes, 1996). They are learning to participate on a global platform. Even in Bhutan, the notion of citizenship is widely seen as extending beyond the community, *dzongkhags*, and nation to provide emphasis on global citizenship.

Even teachers lack adequate civic knowledge and democratic practices. The study found that teachers in some schools hesitate to share their opinions during a formal discussion. The hierarchical culture looms large and they fear to express dissenting views. A strong culture of dominance is prevalent in these schools. Such a culture can affect the strengthening of the institution of democracy in the country. The lack of civic knowledge is further confirmed from consultative meetings through KIIs. One KII (1) respondent remarked, "People's participation is good but they do not seem to have enough knowledge [of democracy, citizenship, how local government functions, etc.], citizens do not know what issues to raise and at what level". This is an indication that lack of civic knowledge is a general concern not just among students and teachers but also in communities. Earlier studies have also shown similar issues (NC & Helvetas, 2016; Helvetas, n.d.). While it cannot be generalised, some of these findings are an indication of the need for formal civic education and awareness programmes in schools as well as in communities. Bird (2010) argued that civic education is an essential tool to establish mutual respect by developing the capacity to think critically, evaluate arguments, and contribute intelligently and constructively in discussions. It is evident that civic education will build mutual respect between school management and students, school management and teachers, school management and parents, and between local leaders and community people.

### **5.1.2 Understanding of democracy and democratic culture**

Although it is more than a decade since Bhutan transitioned into a democratic form of government, the findings of this study show that there is limited democratic culture being developed in schools as well as in communities. Democratic culture in schools is in its infancy. The only democratic process that happens in schools is during school captain elections. Other times when democratic process is observed is when organising cleaning campaigns and preparing for school concerts. School management continues to take decisions in most important matters and, involving students only in a few matters. This has created confusion among students because it is not clear why they are involved in certain matters but are not consulted in other matters that concern them the most. While school management has the prerogative to take major decisions, it would be useful to explain to students how school issues are deliberated, when students' views will be sought, when students will be involved in school matters and why.

At the classroom level, there is minimal attempt to create democratic culture. While some teachers encourage students to speak up and discuss issues, many students indicate that they are unable to discuss politics while in the classroom. History and Civics are taught like any other subjects, but the syllabi of these subjects require teachers to practise a democratic form of teaching and learning but much of the class hours are spent providing lectures to cover what teachers call a 'vast syllabus' that needs to be completed on time. Moreover, students are not able to participate actively in the learning process as they often become passive receivers of information from their teachers. They hardly get opportunity to discuss and share their opinion. Bhutanese teachers and students need to understand that democratic principles in schools and



**Youth of Menchari initiates farm road maintenance facilitating connectivity between Menchari and Dewathang.**

classrooms provide a solid foundation for learning of democratic principles in general (Schulz, et.al., 2010). While it cannot be completely ascertained from this study, it could be because of the Bhutanese tradition and culture of respect for the teachers and regard for humility that could be preventing the practice of democratic culture in the classroom. This corroborates with the earlier findings of iDiscoveri Education and REC (2009); Sherab (2013); and Sherab and Dorji (2013) that Bhutanese education is teacher dominated, content and examination focused, and that students lack the sense of participation and being critical of information they learn. Given the rapid development that takes place in the 21st century, it is time that students are provided more opportunities to be self-directed learners, participate in class discussions, be more critical and analytical, and understand rights and responsibilities.

It is evident that teachers themselves need to know more about democracy, and more importantly their cultural mindset prevents them from being able to exercise their rights to freedom of expression for fear of repercussion. The fear of repercussion could stem from their teachers' limited civic knowledge.

Democracy itself is a relatively new concept and until now the Bhutanese education system did not have any element of civic education (Wangmo, 2016). Teachers' lack of civic knowledge is not isolated to Bhutanese context alone. Studies elsewhere confirm that "most teachers did not learn, or at least did not have adequate time to master, the kinds of high-leverage pedagogies that are so critical to quality civic education" (Rebell, 2016, p.8).

Democratic culture can come only through decentralisation of power and responsibilities. The popular saying "decentralisation stops the moment it reaches you" has become a reality in Bhutan. At the *Gewog* level, local leaders report similar experiences and claim that civil servants hold on to decision-making power that they had prior to democracy. There appears to be some confusion in the roles that merit clarification. It could also be due to a lack of capacity, thus resulting in a lack of confidence in local government to operate more democratically (Helvetas, n.d.).

At the community level as well, democratic culture is not as vibrant for various reasons. Some communities express a lack of community vitality due to growing individualism. People in such communities expect other people to do the work that is of a common concern. In other communities, there are non-performing village representatives who neither consult people nor take feedback on issues that concern the people. An extract from a focus group discussion indicates that there is a huge issue as shared, “Yes, yes, we made suggestions regarding the drinking water problem but he (local leader) did not follow up regarding the issue to the *Dzongkhag*. Instead he told us to make an appeal ourselves” (FGD7, Res5). There is yet another type of problem associated with the lack of a democratic culture in the community. In this case, the public decides on a certain thing after consultation but the local leaders do not stick to the decision that was made (FGD8, Res4).

Civic knowledge alone is not adequate. Bernadette (2005, p. 6) rightly asserted that the focus on factual knowledge and lack of skills means that students will know a lot of facts but not skills required for effective participation in democratic life. The study further confirms that “Democracy is best learned in democratic settings.” Citizens should be provided plenty of opportunities to participate in discussions that are relevant to their life, make decisions, and be accountable to what they say and do. To impart civic knowledge, instituting democratic culture through various interventions such as the practice of school election, democracy clubs, and providing more opportunities to the students to lead and organise school activities are crucial. Children need to be put into appropriate contexts for authentic and experiential learning.

### **5.1.3 Participation in democratic process**

Students are aware that democracy gives them the right to participate in making decisions on issues that affect them and their community. They are also aware that their rights come with duties towards others. These students are willing to volunteer, obey laws and know that they should vote for the right people who will steer the country towards the right direction. Students, especially from the project schools have engaged in numerous organised voluntary services in communities. However, in the existing scenario, students have neither the platform nor the support from teachers and school management to actively engage in democratic processes. Findings from this study confirm that students’ desire for more participation, and to be able to analyse situations, and have critical thinking are being discouraged by the traditional system of a top down approach of managing an organisation that is still being practised. There is evidence to show that students and even teachers express fear of being critical of their seniors or their management. In other countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, students generally can make up their own minds, share their opinions in the class freely, and on the other hand, teachers and school management are open to discussion (Schulz, et.al. 2016). Such findings have implications for curriculum and school experience. School is an influential variable in initiating any change in young citizens. Students are enthusiastic about strengthening the foundation of democracy, but findings of this study suggest that there are traditional (cultural) barriers that do not allow them to practise the skills, nor undertake more participatory actions. Inability to actively participate in the democratic process is likely to obstruct democracy from taking firm roots as aspired by the monarchs (Parliament of Bhutan & UNDP, 2019). It is observed that like in many other democratic countries, Bhutanese students have interest in and pay attention to politics because “schooling provides the required knowledge, values, and skills” (Jarvis, Montoya & Mulvoy, 2005; Schulz, et.al., 2016).

#### **5.1.4 Social media for information and other purposes**

This study revealed that students from project schools rely on social media for information and for many other purposes. They claim that they get instant information from social media, while mainstream media are delayed by hours and sometimes even by days. Students thought that the news from mainstream media becomes outdated by the time people read it. When they were challenged about the accuracy of information in social media, students claimed that the information they see in social media is accurate and authentic because they are uncensored, and almost always accompanied with video clips.

Students also prefer social media for numerous other reasons. They use social media such as Instagram, Twitter, WeChat, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Messenger for communication, listening to music, saving their pictures and video clips, conducting group meetings, writing and publishing and making announcements. This study also revealed that students of the project schools critically analysed media messages. They tend to use and follow a specific media which they think are reliable although they use more than one source to verify the information. Interestingly, the project school students thought that the mainstream media often provided biased information. While it was beyond the scope of this study, it is something that could be explored in the future.

#### **5.1.5 Current election practises**

This study revealed that youths are observant and reflect on what is going on in the country. They criticise the current practice of voting for friends or relatives in local and national elections. Findings from this study reaffirm the importance of voting for the right people in order to have a strong government. These students categorically point out that every candidate must be critically studied by looking at their track record. They also suggested that the manifesto of every political party must be studied carefully before one votes. It is encouraging to note that students are learning the right lessons even from the wrong examples. They express enthusiasm about participating and engaging in politics when they grow up. The good thing is these student respondents are already putting their thoughts into action. In school elections, students are carefully assessing all candidates and are voting for those who they know are capable, have leadership qualities and are willing to invest their time and energy into school affairs. They also see that the candidates possess the required skill to represent the student body instead of just following orders. Political aspirations among youths look quite promising. These students engage in political discussions among themselves, with their family and in classes with their teachers. Additionally, youths also use social media to read news articles and to write their thoughts and opinions on issues that concern them.

However, students see a major flaw in the existing pattern of voting for friends and relatives. They are not happy with such practices, and according to the new barometer from the University of Zurich and the Social Science Research Centre Berlin, the first criteria for a good democracy is citizens' satisfaction with the correct functioning of its institutions and mechanisms (University of Zurich, 2011). Further, Morlino (2004) also claims, "a good democracy can be said to be one that presents a stable institutional



Students carrying out their Local Action Plans

structure that realises the liberty and equality of citizens through the legitimate and correct functioning of its institutions and mechanisms. A good democracy is thus the first and foremost a broadly legitimated regime that completely satisfies its citizens.”

### **5.1.6 Differences between the project and the control schools**

Findings from this study revealed some key differences in terms of student perceptions of what constitutes a good citizen, participation in school life, school curriculum, political action in terms of media, and political action in terms of adult expectation. The project school students’ perceptions of the described conditions above were significantly higher compared to their counterparts in the control school. Though this research was intended to establish baseline data, because the research couldn’t be conducted prior to the project intervention, the activities already implemented in the project schools could have caused some of the differences between the control and pilot schools.

### **5.1.7 Gender difference on Bhutan’s politics and governance**

This study found that female students discussed more about politics and governance with their peers, family, and teachers compared to their male counterparts. While the exact reasons cannot be determined from the findings of this study, it is worth exploring further in the future.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

All the findings presented and discussed in the previous sections have implications for relevant stakeholders - the Ministry of Education, Royal Education Council, and schools. Other stakeholders include the Election Commission of Bhutan, Department of Local Governance, and civil society organisations like the BCMD. Hence, the following recommendations are proposed:

### 5.2.1 Need to strengthen democratic culture in schools

There is much enthusiasm among students to learn and engage in democratic processes at the school level. Relevant stakeholders such as the MoE, REC, and schools need to facilitate in creating democratic culture in schools.

First, ***teach students citizenship education***. Citizenship education is essential especially in Bhutan as the roles and responsibilities of citizens have been redefined as a result of the transition into a democratic form of government. It is imperative for students to know their rights and responsibilities in order to participate meaningfully in democratic processes. Existing literature supports the notion that active citizenship and democratic culture should be promoted and nurtured in citizens when they are at the formative age. As O'Connor and Romer (2006) rightly argue, citizenship traits are learned behaviour and it can be derived only from the school system. Earlier research has also shown that democratic forms of school governance and civic related activities at the school contribute to higher levels of political efficacy among students (Schulz, et.al., 2016). It is heartening to learn that REC is already working on a school curriculum for citizenship education. It would be useful if civic education is made experiential and embedded in the local context.

Second, ***encourage students to exercise their rights and responsibilities***. Schools as a social context for development and learning play a crucial role in providing platforms for students to exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities. Ample opportunities must be provided in real situations through hands-on experiences such as enabling students to share their views when they are treated unfairly by a teacher, asking to be included when there are discussions on issues that concern them, and voting for school captains. We also acknowledge that school management does not always need to have students on decision-making as long as the schools consult students for their views, and are transparent about how decisions are made. At the same time, students must also be taught to be accountable to what they say and do. Fixing accountability can help in building them into active and responsible citizens.

Third, ***encourage teachers to create democratic environments in the classroom***. Civic education alone is not enough for students to acquire the required knowledge of democracy and democratic culture. Teachers can play a critical role in creating a friendly democratic environment in their classrooms thereby modeling democratic ideals and practices. In such an environment, students could be guided on how to share their views and concerns, respect other people's views and opinions, and to be critical and analytical. Creating democratic culture should not be restricted to history and civics classes but a whole school practise.

Fourth, ***encourage students to engage in community services***. Communities in Bhutan are wonderful platforms for students to practise what they learn in school. Communities provide students opportunities to try and test their skills such as leadership, collaboration, communication, interpersonal, perseverance, resource management, and many more. Concurrently, community people will also benefit from students in numerous ways. This current project initiated by BCMD that provides opportunities for students to map a community and design projects based on community assets is a wonderful and noble initiative that must be further modelled in all Bhutanese schools. This project has already made some visible and tangible impacts.

## 5.2.2 Promoting active participation and democratic culture

Currently, BCMD has been playing a proactive role in terms of promoting active participation and democratic culture at the local community level. Other CSOs and NGOs could also play an active role in supporting democracy and for democratic culture to flourish in Bhutan. Thus, we recommend the following.

First, ***provide workshops on civic knowledge among civil servants***. Of all the different sections of population in Bhutan, civil servants may need to be provided with a comprehensive training package on civic knowledge. An orientation for civil servants is crucial because they are at the helm of governance, manning the executive wing of the government. They need to be oriented to the changing demands of the democratic governance in the country. Democracy is a fairly new form of government which gives people certain privileges that civil servants definitely need to be aware of when executing their roles. As of today, a majority of civil servants have only participated in a few local and national elections but it appears that they have hardly learned to exercise their roles and responsibilities in democratic Bhutan. Such a training will equip civil servants to lead in strengthening the institution of democracy in Bhutan.

Second, ***train local leaders on their roles and responsibilities in democratic setting***. Considering that local leaders are increasingly becoming instrumental in taking decisions on community development that requires them to have sound knowledge in democratic processes, all local leaders should be provided with some foundational course on democracy. Real democracy should happen at the grassroots level especially when taking decisions for the communities. Hence, the local leaders are key personnel at the grassroots level. Local leaders constitute a mixed group of people with varied experiences. Some are former civil servants who are well educated. Some local leaders come from business backgrounds while a majority has only basic functional literacy level. These local leaders in turn could create awareness and educate the community people. Such support is likely to solve a lot of confusion that currently exists around the roles and responsibilities of local government and people.

## 5.2.3 Preparing teachers

School systems anywhere else are largely dependent on teachers. Given the current findings in terms of how schools are run and how teaching is managed, we highly recommend teacher training colleges to focus on training teachers in active citizenship and democratic culture along with their own subject of specialisation. Furthermore, history and social studies teachers who are likely to teach citizenship education must be properly trained to handle the subject delivery well. Professional learning of citizenship education for teachers in terms of knowledge, skills, values and pedagogy is important.

## 5.2.4 Future research

Findings from this study raised a number of issues that need to be thoroughly studied in the future.

First, ***study civics curriculum to ascertain adequate lessons on democracy***. Recent research has identified issues such as the lack of citizenship education content, delivery, textbook, teacher preparation in terms of the current civics education

curriculum (Wangmo, 2016). The REC is currently working on revising the current civics curriculum. Future researchers are recommended to study how well the revised curriculum caters to the needs of education on democracy in Bhutan.

Second, *observe democratic processes in schools*. In order to understand how democracy has progressed at school level, future researchers might like to engage in an ethnographic study. Institutionalised platforms for democratic processes in schools could be experienced.

Third, *observe civics classes to get a deeper understanding of the classroom environment*. In addition to analysing civics curriculum and other relevant documents, future researchers could also observe and participate in civics education in classrooms. Connections can be made on how civics lessons translate to democratic practices in schools.

Fourth, *gender differences* in terms of student perceptions of Bhutan's politics and governance needs to be further explored to establish the cause and effect relationship.



Students of Dewathang Primary School marks zebra-crossing to improve pedestrian safety as part of their Local Action Plan.

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# Appendix 1: Survey questionnaire

## Baseline survey

An inquiry into citizen participation and democratic culture at the local level

Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) is developing a baseline report on “Citizen participation and democratic culture at the local level”. In this regard, this questionnaire survey is conducted to gather views on citizenship and democracy at the community level. Thus, BCMD would like to request you to spend some time responding to this questionnaire. Your honest response will enrich the report which will help enhance efforts to improve and strengthen democratic culture and citizenship participation. We will maintain high confidentiality (No one in your school will see your answer).

Note: This study is conducted by Lholing RigZom Consultancy on behalf of BCMD. The survey questionnaire is adapted from Citizenship Education survey in Singapore conducted by Associate Professor SIM Boon Yee Jasmine of the National Institute of Education, Singapore.

### Part A: Your background

1. I am a (Tick the appropriate box only):

Girl  Boy  Other  (Please specify).....

2. I am ..... years old

3. I study as (Tick the appropriate box only): Boarder  Day scholar

4. What is your ethnic background?

Ngalop  Tshangla/Sharchop  Lhotshampa  Khengpa

Kurtoep  Other  (Please specify).....

5. My ambition is to be.....

### Part B: Test of civic knowledge

Each of the questions or incomplete statements in this test is followed by four possible answers. You are to decide which one of these answers is best. **Tick one** answer by placing a **cross (X)** in the box next to the answer you think is correct.

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Democracy is voting and elections
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Democracy is gift from the Druk Gyalpo
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Democracy is decentralisation of power and governance by people
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Democracy is shouldering of responsibility by all the people

2. Three of these statements are opinions and one is a fact. Which of the following is a FACT?

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	I can exercise my rights without considering my duties
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	It is okay to know my duties
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	My rights come with duties
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	It is ok to know my rights as a Bhutanese

3. The Head of *Dzongkhag Tshogdu* is (Choose the correct information)

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Gewog Thrizin</i>
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Dasho Dzongda</i>
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Dzongkhag Tshogdu Thrizin</i>
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Dzongkhag Tshogdu Secretary</i>

4. An active citizen is someone who (Choose the correct information)

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Volunteers every time someone asks
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Votes, voice concerns and takes action
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Follows the elected leaders obediently
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Exercises rights and not duties

5. Three of the statements define a good democratic culture while one does not. Choose the statement that does not define a good democratic culture?

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	People get opportunity to participate in decision-making
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	People can express their views without accountability
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Voices of people are heard by leaders
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Leaders take action on concerns raised by the people

6. Which of the following is not an accurate statement about the Media?

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Media is one way to keep us informed
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	All media are factual and believable
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Media is a platform to express our concerns
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Media also provides entertainment besides news

7. Which of the following is an accurate statement about laws?

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Laws are framed and passed by the Parliament
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Laws are made by the police
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Laws are valid only if all citizens have voted to accept them
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Laws prevent criticism of the government

8. Which of the following is a political right? The right ...

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Of pupils to learn about politics in school
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Of citizens to vote and stand for election
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Of adults to have a job
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Of politicians to have a salary

9. A woman who has a young child is interviewed for a job at a hotel. Which of the following is an example of discrimination? She does not get the job because ...

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	She has no previous experience
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	She is a mother
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	She speaks only one language
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	She demands a high salary

10. In democratic countries what is the function of having more than one political party?

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	To represent different opinions in the national legislature [e.g. Parliament]
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	To limit political corruption
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	To prevent political demonstrations
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	To encourage economic competition

11. In a democratic political system, which of the following ought to govern the country?

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Religious leaders
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	A small group of well-educated people
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Popularly elected representatives
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Experts on government and political affairs

12. Which of the following is most likely to cause a government to be called non-democratic?

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	People are not allowed to criticise the government
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	The political parties criticise each other often
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	People must pay very high taxes
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Every citizen has the right to a job

13. Three of these statements are facts and one is an opinion. Which of the following is an OPINION?

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Actions by individual countries are the best way to solve environmental problems
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Many countries contribute to the pollution of the environment
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Some countries offer to cooperate in order to protect environment
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Water pollution often comes from several different sources

14. Three of these statements are opinions and one is a fact. Which of the following is a FACT?

A.	<input type="checkbox"/>	People with very low incomes should not pay any taxes
B.	<input type="checkbox"/>	In many countries rich people pay higher taxes than poor people
C.	<input type="checkbox"/>	It is fair that some citizens pay higher taxes than others
D.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Donations to needy people are the best way to reduce differences between rich and poor

### Part C: Democracy

You are going to read a list of things that might happen in a country that is a democracy. Each one of them could either be good and have positive results for democracy or it could be bad and have negative results for democracy. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, because we just want to know what you think about democracy and the things that might influence it. Please tick the box in the column which best fits your opinion. If you think that the statement does not apply, put a tick in the circle in the last column.

Sl. No.	Indicators	Very bad for democracy	Somewhat bad for democracy	Somewhat good for democracy	Very good for democracy	Don't know/ doesn't apply
C1	When everyone has the right to express their opinions freely that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C2	When differences in income and wealth between the rich and the poor are small, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C3	When political leaders in power give jobs in the government [public sector] to members of their family, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C4	When newspapers are free of all government control, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C5	When private businesses have no restrictions from government, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C6	When one company owns all the newspapers, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C7	When people demand their political and social rights, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C8	When political parties have rules that support women to become political leaders, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C9	When people who are critical of the government are forbidden from speaking at public meetings, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C10	When citizens have the right to elect political leaders freely, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C11	When courts and judges are influenced by politicians, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C12	When many different organisations are available for people who wish to belong to them, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C13	When young people have an obligation to participate in activities to help the community, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C14	When a minimum income [living standard] is assured for everyone, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C15	When political parties have different opinions [positions] on important issues, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C16	When people participate in political parties in order to influence government, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C17	When laws that women claim are unfair to them are changed, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C18	When all the newspapers present the same opinion about politics, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C19	When people refuse to obey a law which violates human rights, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C20	When newspapers are forbidden to publish stories that might offend those in government, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C21	When wealthy business people have more influence on government than others, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C22	When government leaders are trusted without question, that is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Part D: Good citizens

In this section there are some statements that could be used to explain what a good citizen is or what a good citizen does. There are no right and wrong answers to these questions. For each of these statements, tick one box to show how important you believe each is for explaining what a good citizen is or does.

Sl. No.	An individual who is a good citizen ...	Not important	Somewhat unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important	Don't know
D1	Obeys the law	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D2	Votes in every election	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D3	Votes for the capable candidate	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D4	Knows about the country's history	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D5	Would be willing to join voluntary groups	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D6	Follows political issues in the newspaper, on the radio or on TV	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D7	Participates in activities to benefit people in the community	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D8	Shows respect for government leaders	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D9	Takes part in activities promoting human right	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D10	Engages in political discussions	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D11	Takes part in activities to protect the environment	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D12	Is patriotic and loyal to the country	<input type="checkbox"/>				
D13	Would be willing to ignore a law that violated human rights	<input type="checkbox"/>				

**Part E: Government**

Below you will find some statements about the responsibilities of the government [state]. What responsibilities should the government have? Read each of these statements and tick the appropriate box to decide whether what is described should or should not be the government's [state's] responsibility.

Sl. No.	Indicators	Definitely should not be the government's responsibility	Probably should not be the government's responsibility	Probably should be the government's responsibility	Definitely should be the government's responsibility	Don't know
E1	To guarantee a job for everyone who wants one	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E2	To keep prices of goods under control	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E3	To provide basic health care for everyone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E4	To provide industries with the support they need to grow	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E5	To reduce differences in income and wealth among people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E6	To provide free basic education for all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E7	To be sure there are equal political opportunities for men and women	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E8	To control pollution of the environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E9	To guarantee peace and order [stability] within the country	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E10	To promote good behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Part F: Our country

In this section you will find some statements about BHUTAN. Please read each statement and select the box in the column which corresponds to the way you feel about the statement

Sl. No.	Indicators	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
F1	To help protect jobs in Bhutan we should buy products made in Bhutan	<input type="checkbox"/>				
F2	We should prevent other countries from trying to influence political decisions in Bhutan	<input type="checkbox"/>				
F3	The flag of Bhutan is important to me	<input type="checkbox"/>				
F4	We should be aware that there can be external interference in the country's governance	<input type="checkbox"/>				
F5	Bhutan deserves respect from other countries for what we have accomplished/achieved	<input type="checkbox"/>				
F6	I have great love for Bhutan	<input type="checkbox"/>				
F7	People should support their country even if they think their country is doing something wrong	<input type="checkbox"/>				
F8	The national anthem of Bhutan is important to me	<input type="checkbox"/>				
F9	I would not prefer to live permanently in another country	<input type="checkbox"/>				
F10	We should stop outsiders from influencing Bhutan's traditions and culture	<input type="checkbox"/>				

## Part G: Political system

In this section there are some statements about the political system and your personal view on politics in general. *Please read each statement and select the box in the column which corresponds to the way you feel about the statement.*

Sl. No.	Indicators	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
G1	The government cares a lot about what all of us think about laws	<input type="checkbox"/>				
G2	I know more about politics than most people my age	<input type="checkbox"/>				
G3	The government is doing its best to find out what ordinary people want	<input type="checkbox"/>				
G4	The government cares about the opinions of ordinary people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
G5	When political issues or problems are being discussed, I usually have something to say	<input type="checkbox"/>				
G6	In this country, people feel free to question the government	<input type="checkbox"/>				
G7	The politicians remember the needs of the voters who elected them	<input type="checkbox"/>				
G8	I am able to understand most political issues easily	<input type="checkbox"/>				
G9	When people get together to demand change, the leaders in government listen	<input type="checkbox"/>				
G10	I am interested in politics	<input type="checkbox"/>				

## Part H: School

Listed below you will find some statements on students' participation in school life. *Please read each statement and select the box in the column which corresponds to the way you feel about the statement.*

Sl. No.	Indicators	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
H1	Electing student captains to suggest changes in how the school is run [how to solve school problems] makes schools better	<input type="checkbox"/>				
H2	Lots of positive changes happen in this school when students work together	<input type="checkbox"/>				
H3	Organising groups of students to share their opinions could help solve problems in this school	<input type="checkbox"/>				
H4	If members of my class felt they were unfairly treated, I would be willing to go with them to speak to the teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>				
H5	Students acting together in groups can have more influence on what happens in this school than students acting by themselves	<input type="checkbox"/>				
H6	I am interested in participating in discussions about school problems	<input type="checkbox"/>				
H7	When school problems are being discussed I usually have something to say	<input type="checkbox"/>				

## Section I: School curriculum

In this section we would like to know what you have learned in school. *Please read each statement listed below and select the box in the column which corresponds to the way you feel about the statement.*

Sl. No.	Indicators	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
I1	In school I have learnt to understand people who have different ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I2	In school I have learnt to co-operate [work together] in groups with other students	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I3	In school I have learnt to contribute to solving problems in the community	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I4	In school I have learnt to be a patriotic and loyal citizen of my country	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I5	In school I have learnt how to act to protect the environment	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I6	In school I have learnt to be concerned about what happens in other countries	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I7	In school I have learnt about the importance of voting in national and local elections	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I8	In school I have been encouraged to ask questions	<input type="checkbox"/>				

## Part J: Political action 1

In this set of questions, you will find some activities related to politics. *For each of these activities, tick the box to show how often you do it.*

How often do you have discussions of what is happening in Bhutan's politics and governance?

Sl. No.	Indicators	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Don't know
J1	With people of your own age [peers]	<input type="checkbox"/>				
J2	With parents or other adult family members	<input type="checkbox"/>				
J3	With teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>				

How often do you have discussions of what is happening in international politics?

Sl. No.	Indicators	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Don't know
J4	With people of your own age [peers]	<input type="checkbox"/>				
J5	With parents or other adult family members	<input type="checkbox"/>				
J6	With teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>				

How often do you ...

Sl. No.	Indicators	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Don't know
J7	Read articles (stories) in the newspaper about what is happening in Bhutan?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
J8	Read articles (stories) in the newspaper about what is happening in other countries?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
J9	Listen to news broadcasts on television?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
J10	Listen to news broadcasts on the radio?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
J11	Read articles (stories) online?	<input type="checkbox"/>				

## Part K: Political action 2

Listed below are several types of action that adults could take: **When you are an adult, what do you expect that you will do?** Tick one box in each column for each action to show how likely you would do it.

Sl. No.	Indicators	I will certainly not do this	I will probably not do this	I will probably do this	I will certainly do this	Don't know
K1	Vote in national and local elections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
K2	Get information about candidates before voting in an election	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
K3	Join a political party	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
K4	Write letters to a newspaper about social or political concerns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
K5	Be a candidate for a local or city office	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Listed below are several types of action that you as a student could take during the next few years: **What do you expect that you will do?** Again, tick one box in each column for each action to show how likely you would be to do it. If you don't know, put a tick in the circle in the last column.

Sl. No.	Indicators	I will certainly not do this	I will probably not do this	I will probably do this	I will certainly do this	Don't know
K6	Volunteer time to help [benefit] [poor or elderly] people in the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
K7	Collect money for a social cause	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
K8	Collect signatures for a petition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Part L: Classroom

The next part includes some statements about things that happen in your school. When answering these questions think especially about classes in history, civic and values education or social studies. *Please read each statement and select the box in the column which corresponds to the way you feel about the statement.*

Sl. No.	Indicators	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Don't know
L1	Students feel free to disagree openly with their teachers about political and social issues during class	<input type="checkbox"/>				
L2	Students are encouraged to make up their own minds about issues	<input type="checkbox"/>				
L3	Teachers respect our opinions and encourage us to express them during class	<input type="checkbox"/>				
L4	Teachers place great importance [stress, emphasis] on discussing issues rather than learning facts or dates when presenting history or political events	<input type="checkbox"/>				
L5	Students feel free to express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students	<input type="checkbox"/>				
L6	Teachers encourage us to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions	<input type="checkbox"/>				
L7	Teachers present several sides of an issue when explaining it in class	<input type="checkbox"/>				
L8	Students bring up current political events for discussion in class	<input type="checkbox"/>				
L9	Discussing issues rather than memorising dates and facts is the best way to get a good grade [mark] from teachers in these classes	<input type="checkbox"/>				

## Part M: Any other comments

Please share any other comments that you may have on citizen's participation and democratic culture in your village and school.

End of questionnaire

Please check now that you have answered all of the questions.  
Thank you very much for responding to the survey

## **Appendix 2: Interview guide for baseline data (Students)**

### **An inquiry into citizen participation and democratic culture at the local level**

#### **Introduction**

I am so and so representing Lholing RigZom Consultancy. We are conducting a research study for BCMD to understand citizen participation and democratic culture at the local community level. I would like to thank each one of you for agreeing to take part in the focus group discussion. You must have also responded to the survey questionnaire, thank you for that.

#### **Grand tour question**

So, this time we are going to interview you to understand in more depth about your school, your classroom, how teachers teach, curriculum, citizenship, local government, democracy, and the media. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions, so feel free to share what you think. All responses will be CONFIDENTIAL. Could you please begin by sharing your experiences of learning about citizenship and democracy in the school both within the classroom as well as outside as a part of the extra-curricular activities?

Based on the kind of responses they provide, ask some of the questions provided below.

#### **Part A: Pedagogy**

- Can you describe your experience of studying Social Studies/ History/ Civics?
- In a typical lesson, how much time is spent on group work, and how much time does the teacher lecture?
- Are there project works or field trips in these subjects? If yes, can you share what you learnt from your project work or field trip?
- Do you discuss current affairs related to these subjects in school? If yes, share one that was discussed and how you felt.
- Does your teacher encourage you to look for information outside of your textbooks? If yes, from where?

#### **Part B: Governance of school**

- How are decisions concerning students made and communicated in your school?
- Are the students consulted on any plans and ideas? If so, for what kind of decisions are the students consulted?
- Do you feel safe to give feedback, ask questions, or express your views to teachers/school management about decisions and issues that affect you or the students in general? Share one situation.

- Was there ever an occasion when you felt the need to change a rule in your school or thought that a decision made was unfair? How did you go about raising that issue?

### **Part C: Citizenship**

- What do you think are the qualities of a good citizen in Bhutan's democracy?

### **Part D: Community engagement**

- Can you explain how aware are you about the community you live in?
- Does your school have community involvement programmes? Name some.
- Did you participate in any of these programmes? Share your experience and what you learnt from it.

### **Part E: Democracy**

- Share some key characteristics of democracy in Bhutan's context.
- Did you vote in any of the past school elections? Why?
- Tell some reasons for choosing the captain that you voted for? Will you vote for the same captain again if he/she stands again? Why?
- Have you participated in school meetings? Can you explain how the meeting was conducted?
- Was it open and safe for students to express themselves responsibly?
- Were differing views and perspectives solicited and heard?
- How were decisions made?

### **Part F: Media**

- Do you listen to news on the radio, watch TV or read newspapers?
- Why is it important for you to read/listen to or watch TV for news?
- What do you use social media for?
- How do you figure out if a social media post is real or fake?
- What do you think is the role of media in a democracy?

## **Interview guide for baseline data (Community)**

### **An inquiry into citizen participation and democratic culture at the local level**

#### **Introduction**

I am so and so representing Lholing RigZom Consultancy. We are conducting this research for BCMD to understand citizen participation and democratic culture at the local level. I would like to thank each one of you for agreeing to take part in the focus group discussion.

## Grand tour question

We would like to ask a few questions about citizenship, local government, democracy, and media. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions, so feel free to share what you think. All responses will be CONFIDENTIAL. Could you please start by sharing what you understand by citizenship and democracy?

### Part A: Citizenship

- What do you think are the qualities of a good citizen in Bhutan's democracy?
- What are your rights as a Bhutanese citizen? Provide some examples. Can you share an incident when you exercised these rights?
- What are your responsibilities as a Bhutanese citizen? Provide some examples. Share how you fulfill these responsibilities as a citizen?
- Where did you learn these rights and responsibilities from?
- How do you deal with other Bhutanese who do not share similar values and ideas with you?
- How well do you know your community people and the issues?
- Have you initiated anything in your community or participated in voluntary work? How well did the community work together?

### Part B: Local government

- What is the role of the Tshogpa/thromde Thuemi? Do you know the tshogpa/thuemi of your *Gewog*?
- Are you aware of what your geog/community development plans are? How did you come to know about them?
- Do you participate in zomdues or public consultations? Share your experience of decision-making and the nature of discussions at such forums. (probe: Are citizen's voices solicited, heard, how is differing perspectives and ideas dealt with?).
- Can you share how decisions affecting the community are passed/made by the local government?
- How do local governments seek feedback and consult people/community and make decisions?
- How are decisions relayed back to the community?
- Was there ever an occasion when you felt that a decision taken was unfair or unsound? Did you express your reservations or dissent? How was it received? How did you feel?

### Part C: Democracy

- Share some key characteristics of democracy in Bhutan's context.
- Did you vote in any of the past *Gewog* elections? Why? We are not evaluating your participation, please give us an honest response.
- Tell some reasons for choosing the leader that you voted for? Will you vote for the same leader again if he/she stands again? Why?

- How did you assess those qualities in the leader?
- Will you vote for the same candidates again if he/she stands again? Why?
- Was there ever an occasion when you felt that the leader did not live up to his/her pledge/promise or expected roles and responsibilities?
- Were you able to raise this issue with the representative/give feedback?
- Are the local leaders able to represent the voice of the people (voters/constituents) in the decision-making processes (*Gewog Tshogde/Dzongkhag Tshogdu*)?

#### **Part D: Media**

- Do you listen to the news on the radio, watch TV or read newspapers?
- Why is it important for you to read/listen to or watch TV for news?
- What do you use social media for?
- How do you figure out if a social media post is real or fake?
- What do you think is the role of the media in a democracy?

### Appendix 3: Significance test and detailed analysis of civic knowledge test (findings in percentage).

SL. No.	Assessment indicators	Options for students to choose from	DCS and Shaba HSS (n=55)	Lango MSS (n=64)	Average of Control and Project School (N=119)	Sig. (One way Anova)
B1	Which one is the best definition of Democracy in your view?	A. Democracy is voting and elections	16.4	28.1	22.7	.257
		B. Democracy is gift from the <i>Druk Gyalpo</i>	20.0	15.6	17.6	
		C. Democracy is decentralisation of power and governance by people	20.0	18.8	19.3	
		D. Democracy is shouldering of responsibility by all the people	41.8	35.9	38.7	
B2	Three of these statements are opinions and one is a fact. Which of the following is a FACT?	A. I can exercise my rights without considering my duties	30.9	25.0	27.7	.355
		B. It is ok to know my duties	3.6	1.6	2.5	
		C. My rights come with duties	32.7	39.1	36.1	
		D. It is ok to know my rights as a Bhutanese	29.1	34.4	31.9	
B3	The Head of <i>Dzongkhag Tshogdu</i> is	A. <i>Gewog Thrizin</i>	10.9	1.6	5.9	.845
		B. <i>Dasho Dzongda</i>	49.1	68.8	59.7	
		C. <i>Dzongkhag Tshogdu Thrizin</i>	36.4	25.0	30.3	
		D. <i>Dzongkhag Tshogdu</i> Secretary	1.8	1.6	1.7	
B4	An active citizen is someone who	A. Volunteers every time someone asks	5.5	6.3	5.9	.244
		B. Votes, voice concerns and takes action	67.3	75.0	71.4	
		C. Follows the elected leaders obediently	20.0	15.6	17.6	
		D. Exercises rights and not duties	7.3	3.1	5.0	
B5	Three of the statements define a good democratic culture while one does not.	A. People get opportunity to participate in decision making	14.5	9.4	11.8	.869
		B. People can express their views without accountability	50.9	62.5	57.1	
		C. Voices of people are heard by leaders	18.2	10.9	14.3	
		D. Leaders take action on concerns raised by the people	14.5	14.1	14.3	
B6	Which of the following is not an accurate statement about Media?	A. Media is one way to keep us informed	10.9	4.7	7.6	.920
		B. All media are factual and believable	67.3	73.4	70.6	
		C. Media is a platform to express our concerns	9.1	14.1	11.8	
		D. Media also provides entertainment besides news	12.7	7.8	10.1	

B7	Which of the following is an accurate statement about laws?	A. Laws are framed and passed by the Parliament	50.9	46.9	48.7	.225
		B. Laws are made by the police	23.6	17.2	20.2	
		C. Laws are valid only if all citizens have voted to accept them	10.9	12.5	11.8	
		D. Laws prevent criticism of the government	14.5	21.9	18.5	
B8	Which of the following is a political right? The right ...	A. Of pupils to learn about politics in school	3.6	9.4	6.7	.416
		B. Of citizens to vote and stand for election	81.8	65.6	73.1	
		C. Of adults to have a job	7.3	15.6	11.8	
		D. Of politicians to have a salary	5.5	9.4	7.6	
B9	A woman who has a young child is interviewed for a job at a hotel. Which of the following is an example of discrimination? She does not get the job because ...	A. She has no previous experience	14.5	34.4	25.2	.121
		B. She is a mother	47.3	31.3	38.7	
		C. She speaks only one language	9.1	10.9	10.1	
		D. She demands a high salary	29.1	21.9	25.2	
B10	In democratic countries what is the function of having more than one political party?	A. To represent different opinions in the national legislature [e.g. Parliament]	67.3	54.7	60.5	.088
		B. To limit political corruption	12.7	17.2	15.1	
		C. To prevent political demonstrations	12.7	6.3	9.2	
		D. To encourage economic competition	7.3	21.9	15.1	
B11	In a democratic political system, which of the following ought to govern the country?	A. Religious leaders	12.7	9.4	10.9	.182
		B. A small group of well-educated people	14.5	7.8	10.9	
		C. Popularly elected representatives	23.6	23.4	23.5	
		D. Experts on government and political affairs	47.3	59.4	53.8	
B12	Which of the following is most likely to cause a government to be called non-democratic?	A. People are not allowed to criticise the government	29.1	21.9	25.2	.161
		B. The political parties criticise each other often	38.2	23.4	30.3	
		C. People must pay very high taxes	18.2	43.8	31.9	
		D. Every citizen has the right to a job	14.5	10.9	12.6	

B13	Three of these statements are facts and one is an opinion. Which of the following is an OPINION?	A. Actions by individual countries are the best way to solve environmental problems	36.4	50.0	43.7	.052
		B. Many countries contribute to the pollution of the environment	12.7	15.6	14.3	
		C. Some countries offer to cooperate in order to protect environment	25.5	23.4	24.4	
		D. Water pollution often comes from several different sources	23.6	10.9	16.8	
B14	Three of these statements are opinions and one is a fact. Which of the following is a FACT?	A. People with very low incomes should not pay any taxes	21.8	32.8	27.7	.079
		B. In many countries rich people pay higher taxes than poor people	21.8	28.1	25.2	
		C. It is fair that some citizens pay higher taxes than others	14.5	10.9	12.6	
		D. Donations to needy people are the best way to reduce differences between rich and poor	40.0	28.1	33.6	

**Note:** Total may not add to 100 per cent due to missing values.  
Correct options for each item are highlighted.

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