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BHUTAN CENTRE
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

BHUTAN CENTRE FOR MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

Annual Report 2025

Nurturing democracy in Bhutan through civic engagement, public discourse, and media and democracy literacy

PROGRAMME 1
Empower Accountable, Active & Responsible Citizens

PROGRAMME 2
Creating Knowledge Resources for Citizens

PROGRAMME 3
Media Lab – Enabling Citizen Voice

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Three programmes, one purpose: a vibrant democracy where citizens are informed, engaged, and proactive.

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

Foreword

Eighteen years after its establishment alongside Bhutan's first democratic elections in 2008, the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy remains guided by a simple but enduring conviction: democracy is strongest when citizens are informed, engaged, and empowered to participate meaningfully in shaping their communities and nation.

In 2025, this conviction translated into action across the country. From gewog halls in Tsirang to the National Assembly, and from school classrooms in Samtse to college campuses in Kanglung and Lobesa, BCMD continued to create opportunities for citizens to engage in public life, strengthen democratic institutions and contribute to the decisions that shape their future.

Our work began with a focus on strengthening inclusive local governance in the lead-up to the local government elections. Sixty elected and aspiring local leaders in Bumthang, Mongar, and Samdrup Jongkhar participated in initiatives to understand and strengthen inclusive leadership and representation. In Tsirang, our Gross National Happiness (GNH)-based participatory planning, peer-facilitation and citizen empowerment workshops reached all 12 gewogs, including 37 local government leaders, supporting local leaders to move beyond simply informing communities towards more meaningful consultation and participation by genuinely consulting them. At the national level, 34 Members of Parliament took part in training on gender, minority inclusion, and citizen engagement, reinforcing the importance of inclusive, responsible, and responsive democratic institutions.

Young people continued to be central to our efforts. Through the Youth Summits, the Ripple Camp, and a situation analysis involving 77 young people in Samtse, Chhukha, and Dagana, we created platforms for young people to mindfully and responsibly identify issues affecting their lives and bring their recommendations directly to decision-makers. Our Media and Information Literacy initiatives reached educators, trainers, and more than 220 students and teachers in Media and Democracy Clubs, equipping them with the skills to critically assess information, navigate the digital environment, and report responsibly on issues within their communities.

Recognising the essential role of independent and credible media in a vibrant democracy, BCMD also worked with 19 journalists to strengthen responsible, constructive, and informed reporting. We further brought civil society organisations and media representatives together through our first CSO-Media Round Table, creating space for greater dialogue, collaboration, and a shared understanding of their respective roles in strengthening civic engagement and public accountability.

Public discourse and informed debate remained an important part of our work. Through *The Druk Journal*, the Spring and Autumn issues, *Climate Change in Bhutan: Impact and Response* and *Mindful Governance, Mindful Society*, featured 32 contributions from Bhutanese and international thinkers, offering diverse perspectives on issues central to the country's development and people's progress. Complementing these publications, three *Suja & Dzaw* Conversations held in Lobesa, Kanglung and Gelephu brought together approximately 485 participants for open and thoughtful dialogue on these important themes.

The year also marked an important step forward for civil society in Bhutan. The First Annual CSO Summit in Punakha brought together 45 participants, while quarterly meetings consistently engaged more than 30 organisations, providing valuable opportunities for coordination, exchange and collective reflection. In addition, BCMD initiatives also supported research grants for four CSOs, enabling them to contribute evidence-based findings and community perspectives to policy discussions. These efforts reflect the growing importance of a coordinated, informed, and engaged civil society in advancing national development.

As we look ahead to 2026, BCMD remains committed to deepening this work by supporting local governments to plan and respond to the needs of their communities, empowering young people to become informed and active contributors to society, strengthening responsible and independent media, and creating safe, inclusive, and open spaces for dialogue and public engagement. Our vision of a vibrant democracy, where citizens are informed, engaged, and proactive shall continue to guide our priorities and actions.

None of this would be possible without the trust and support of our donors and development partners; the Board, for its continued guidance and oversight of BCMD's programmes and operations; and the Advisory Members for their valuable strategic, technical and operational support to *The Druk Journal*. We also extend our sincere appreciation to the government institutions, CSOs, media partners, schools, and communities that have worked alongside us throughout the year. Above all, we thank our dedicated team, whose commitment, professionalism, and hard work make this work possible.

Democracy is not sustained by institutions alone. It is strengthened each day through the voices, choices, and participation of citizens. BCMD remains committed to nurturing that participation and contributing to a more informed, inclusive, and vibrant democracy in Bhutan.



Dr Kezang Sherab
Board Chair



Tandin Wangmo
Executive Director

WHO WE ARE

Organisational Goals

VISION

A vibrant democracy where citizens are informed, engaged, and proactive

MISSION

To nurture democracy in Bhutan through civic engagement, public discourse, and media and democracy literacy

Objectives

1. Help citizens understand democratic governance and values.
2. Help citizens understand the importance of information and, therefore, the role of media in a democracy.
3. Empower citizens to be participatory, proactive, responsible, and to hold authorities and service providers accountable.
4. Enhance the visibility and understanding of civil society in Bhutan and promote the role of civil society in a democracy.

Core operating values

Trust and Respect

Treat all people with dignity; build relationships through listening, consent and reciprocity.

Integrity and Accountability

Use resources responsibly, communicate evidence honestly, protect independence and answer for results.

Participation

Create accessible spaces where diverse groups influence design, delivery and decisions.

Teamwork & Collaboration

Share responsibility, knowledge and credit across teams and foster partnerships through collaboration with other institutions.

Leadership and Personal Development

Enable ethical leadership, reflection, wellbeing and continuous learning.

Innovation

Test and adapt ideas responsibly, including emerging technology, using evidence and safeguards.

Inclusion and Do No Harm

Actively remove barriers, protect safety and privacy, and prioritise people at greatest risk of exclusion.

OUR GOVERNANCE

Board Members



CHAIR OF THE BOARD

Dr Kezang Sherab

Board Chair



Dema Lham
Board Member



Dechen Dema
Board Member



Damber Kumar Ghimiray
Board Member



Nima
Board Member



Tandin Wangmo
Member Secretary



Phuntsho Wangdi
Board Member

OUR TEAM

Meet BCMD Staff



LEADING THE TEAM

Tandin Wangmo

Executive Director



Kencho Tshering

Programme Officer



Phuntsho Choden

Programme Officer



Manisha Khawas

Finance Officer



Jigme Khandu

Asst. Programme Officer



Tsheten Lhamo

Asst. Programme Officer



Sonam Yangden

Asst. Programme Officer



Deki Wangmo

Asst. Administration & Accounts Officer

THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

Highlights of 2025

27 programme activities and publications across three programme areas

60 elected and aspiring local leaders trained in three eastern districts

34 Members of Parliament trained on gender and minority inclusion

19 journalists in a five-day workshop on credible, constructive reporting

220+ students and teachers in Media and Democracy Club citizen journalism training

32 articles by Bhutanese thinkers in two issues of The Druk Journal

~485 participants across three Suja & Dzaw Conversations

45 participants at the First Annual CSO Summit in Punakha

2025 month by month

JAN Local government leaders' workshops (Bumthang, Mongar, Samdrup Jongkhar) • Journalists' workshop • Training of Trainers on Media and Information Literacy

FEB Fourth CSO Quarterly Meeting and First Annual CSO Summit, Punakha

MAR Virtual Exchange on Strengthening Good Governance, Bhutan & Europe

APR Training for Members of Parliament on Gender, Minority Inclusion and Citizen Engagement

MAY Suja & Dzaw Conversation on Climate Change, Lobesa

JUL Training of Trainers for teachers on Media and Information Literacy, Trongsa

AUG CSO-Media Round Table • Second Suja & Dzaw Conversation, Kanglung • Child protection consultation

OCT GNH-based planning and Citizen Empowerment workshops, Tsirang • MDC citizen journalism, Samtse • Suja & Dzaw Conversation, Gelephu

DEC Civic Engagement Workshop for Youth, Local Government Leaders and Women • Third CSO Quarterly Meeting

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BHUTAN CENTRE
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY



PROGRAMME

1

Empower Accountable, Active & Responsible Citizens

01

PROGRAMME 1

Strengthening Inclusive Voices in Local Government Across Three Eastern Districts

60 elected and aspiring local leaders

3 eastern districts

3–10 Jan Bumthang, Mongar, Samdrup Jongkhar

In the lead-up to the local government elections, sixty elected and aspiring local leaders across three eastern districts came together to strengthen the skills they need to serve credibly, communicate clearly, and govern inclusively. The workshops, held between 3 and 10 January in Bumthang, Mongar, and Samdrup Jongkhar, brought together men and women leaders in roughly equal numbers.



The training responded to two pressing realities for Bhutanese local democracy. Women remain significantly under-represented in elected local office, and the spread of digital misinformation has made media literacy an unavoidable competency for any leader who wants to communicate honestly with their community. The workshops were designed to address both.



A central aim was to build the confidence of women leaders so they could engage their male counterparts as equals and act as visible role models for other women considering candidacy. Equally deliberate was the framing of male leaders as partners in this work. Sessions encouraged them to recognise their role in creating the conditions of mutual respect, shared platforms, and fair access to opportunity in which women's leadership can take root. Public speaking modules helped participants structure and deliver messages with clarity, while the media-literacy components equipped leaders to identify fake news, slow the spread of misinformation in their constituencies, and use digital channels responsibly.

Each participant left with an action plan tailored to their own gewog, focused on encouraging eligible candidates, particularly women, to contest the upcoming local government elections, cascading the workshop content to peers, and flagging capacity-building gaps for future leaders.



By the end of the series, women leaders reported greater confidence in engaging in public dialogue, and male leaders articulated a clearer understanding of their role in supporting gender-inclusive governance. Sixty action plans now sit with leaders committed to delivering them locally, forming a distributed network of advocates for informed, inclusive participation in the elections ahead. Their

continued work to share what they learned and to build the capacity of others will be central to a more equitable cycle of local leadership.

02

PROGRAMME 1

Empowering Journalists through Transformative Workshop

19 journalists | **5** days of training | **6–10 Jan** 2025

The Bhutanese media landscape is evolving quickly. Journalists are working against tighter deadlines, a steady current of online misinformation, and audiences whose appetite for trustworthy, constructive reporting has rarely been greater. Over five days from 6 to 10 January, nineteen journalists from diverse media houses gathered for an intensive workshop designed to sharpen their craft and broaden their approach.



Participants worked through the foundations of credible reporting: distinguishing fact from opinion, fact-checking sources, identifying misinformation, and grappling with the newer ethical questions of quoting social media users and recognising fake accounts.



Multimedia reporting sat at the centre of the programme. Through practical exercises, journalists explored how text, images, and video can work together to tell stories that travel further and land more clearly. Sessions on composition, headline writing, and the classic news values of timeliness, impact, and conflict helped participants evaluate and shape stories with greater precision.

The workshop also introduced constructive journalism as a different lens through which to see Bhutanese stories. Rather than dwelling on problems alone, participants learned to identify the response, the resilience, and the way forward. They applied the PERMA method (Positive emotions, Engagement, good Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement) to find angles that inform without inflating fear, balance without flattening complexity, and inspire without slipping into sensationalism. Reflective discussions on the strengths and challenges of journalism in Bhutan grounded these techniques in local realities.



Participants had committed to returning to their newsrooms with a sharper ethical compass, a wider multimedia toolkit, and a renewed sense that journalism in Bhutan can both hold power to account and help communities see a way forward.

03

PROGRAMME 1

Training of Trainers on Media and Information Literacy

9 schools and colleges

5 days

13–17 Jan 2025

In an information environment shaped as much by social media as by newsrooms, the ability to navigate, question, and create media responsibly has become a foundational skill for young Bhutanese citizens. Coordinators of the Media and Democracy Clubs (MDCs) sit at the heart of this work in schools and colleges, and a five-day Training of Trainers held from 13 to 17 January was designed to deepen the knowledge and confidence they bring to it.



Coordinators from eight schools and Sherubtse College took part. The programme combined trainer-centred and trainee-centred methodologies, giving participants direct experience of the techniques they would later use with their students. Hands-on sessions covered news writing, vlogging, photo-story creation, and the building blocks of news, while interactive discussions unpacked the more complex concepts of disinformation, misinformation, information disorder, and propaganda.

Central to the training was the AACRA framework (Access, Analyse, Create, Reflect, and Act), which gives coordinators a structured way to help students engage critically with what they read, watch, and share. Sessions on citizen journalism explored its historical development, the opportunities it opens for young voices, the risks it brings, and the strategies that can mitigate those risks responsibly.



Using a learner-centred approach throughout, coordinators worked together to define objectives for their MDCs in the year ahead and to identify the support that would help these clubs thrive. They left with sharper skills, a shared framework, and a clearer sense of how to nurture media literacy and active citizenship in their classrooms. The longer-term ambition is to inspire young Bhutanese to engage with media responsibly and to participate confidently in a democracy that grows stronger with every informed citizen.

04

PROGRAMME 1

GNH-Based Participatory Planning and Community Analysis

25 sector heads, officers and CSO members

5 days

Tsirang Dzongkhag

Bhutan's Constitution places participatory, citizen-led planning at the heart of decentralised governance, yet in practice top-down planning and limited grassroots engagement still shape most local plans.



> We have been doing consultation at the surface.
>
> **— Leki Dorji, Gewog Administrative Officer**

In January, twenty-five Sector Heads, Gewog Administrative Officers, and Civil Society Organisation representatives from Tsirang took part in a five-day Training of Trainers on GNH-based Participatory Planning and Community Analysis. The training equipped them with practical methods for inclusive community consultation and evidence-based planning.



By the close of the workshop, participants had identified clear priorities for change: deeper community engagement, more reliable data collection, deliberate youth involvement, and stronger coordination between Gewogs and Dzongkhags. The training also surfaced candid reflections on past practice. 'We have been doing consultation at the surface,' said Leki Dorji, a Gewog Administrative Officer. Many participants acknowledged that they had rarely engaged with the more diverse groups inside their own constituencies and had not previously considered how young people might contribute to community development. They left with sharper skills, a shared framework, and a renewed commitment to placing communities at the centre of the plans that shape their lives.

05

PROGRAMME 1

Strengthening the Capacity of CSOs through Strategic Planning Training

24 CSO representatives

3 days

As civil society organisations assume an increasingly significant role in Bhutan's development, the ability to plan, deliver, and evaluate programmes with strategic coherence has become essential to their effectiveness.



Twenty-four representatives from a range of CSOs participated in a three-day training on Strategic Planning for Civil Society Organisations, designed to strengthen their capacity to plan, implement, and evaluate programmes with greater coherence and measurable impact.

Participants examined core strategic planning frameworks, including the Theory of Change, the Logical Framework Approach, and Results-Based Management, and worked through fundamental components such as organisational vision, mission, and core values.

The training also addressed how to translate strategic plans into operational practice. Practical sessions on designing SMART indicators and establishing robust Monitoring and Evaluation systems were complemented by group exercises in which CSOs formulated Key Performance Indicators, set realistic targets, and developed risk mitigation plans tailored to their respective mandates. A central theme throughout was the importance of ensuring that each CSO's work aligns logically with its organisational vision and contributes meaningfully to Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals.



By the conclusion of the training, participating groups had developed comprehensive strategic plans that integrated the key elements covered over the three days into coherent and actionable frameworks. The CSOs concluded the programme with renewed vision and structured plans, better equipped to lead inclusive and impactful development work across Bhutan.

06

PROGRAMME 1

Training Parliamentarians on Gender, Minority Inclusion and Citizen Engagement

34 Members of Parliament

28 Apr Thimphu

Inclusion and meaningful citizen engagement are increasingly recognised as foundations of credible democratic governance, yet translating constitutional commitments into everyday practice remains an ongoing challenge in Bhutan as in many other democracies.

On 28 April, thirty-four Members of Parliament from the National Assembly and National Council, together with Secretariat staff, participated in a one-day training in Thimphu on Gender and Minority Inclusion, Public Participation, and Citizens' Engagement.



The session examined the conceptual foundations of inclusion and the structural and cultural barriers that constrain the full participation of women, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable communities in Bhutanese society. Discussions highlighted the persistent gap between policy and practice, including the under-representation of women in political and economic life and the social stigma still encountered by persons with disabilities.

Drawing on international experience, including from countries such as Bolivia, participants examined transformative approaches such as constitutional reform, gender parity laws, and quota systems, and considered their relevance in the Bhutanese context. The benefits of inclusive societies for national and global development were illustrated through the documented successes of mixed teams across economic, social, and political settings.



The training also explored the challenges of civic engagement in Bhutan, ranging from geographic isolation and limited digital literacy to deeply rooted cultural norms. Participants proposed strengthening participatory platforms through civic education in schools and through expanded roles for media, civil society organisations, and local governments.

The session provided a timely opportunity for parliamentarians to reflect on Bhutan's commitments under national and international frameworks for inclusion and good governance, and to acknowledge both the progress made and the gaps that remain. The discussions reinforced the central role of Parliament in translating those commitments into legislation, oversight, and the institutional practices that shape inclusive democracy.

07

PROGRAMME 1

Youth Summit

60 students

3 schools

2 days at Sherubtse College

Bhutan's youth are coming of age in a society that increasingly looks to them not only as future leaders but as present-day contributors to civic life. Equipping them to navigate that role with confidence, critical thinking, and care is a long-term investment in the country's democratic health.



Over two days, sixty students from Rangjung Central School, Jampeling Central School, and Trashigang Middle Secondary School convened at Sherubtse College for the 2025 Youth Summit Programme. Designed for participants aged twelve to eighteen, the summit was structured around dialogue, activities, and critical reflection rather than lectures, and focused on civic rights and responsibilities, the social issues most pressing for young Bhutanese, and media literacy.

> Monthly periods are natural, but sexual intercourse is a choice. Why must we pay for something we never chose?
>
> **— Isha, Youth Summit participant**

Sessions on Civic Mindset and Civic Action invited students to design community maps of their ideal societies. Their drawings revealed consistent aspirations: inclusive schools, equal access to opportunities, green spaces, and safe, judgement-free neighbourhoods. A 'But-Why' analysis exercise then guided students through the root causes of issues they encounter daily, including youth unemployment, limited access to sports and recreational spaces, the unavailability of sanitary pads, cyberbullying and online harassment, social anxiety and limited mental health support, peer discrimination and exclusion, and excessive reliance on social media and artificial intelligence tools. The discussions moved beyond diagnosis to co-created responses, ranging from peer-led awareness campaigns and safe spaces in schools to advocacy for basic amenities and youth-designed media literacy materials.



Isha, a participant, voiced a concern shared by many of her peers. 'I just don't think it's fair,' she observed. 'In our local BHU, condoms are freely avail-

able, but sanitary pads are not. Monthly periods are natural, but sexual intercourse is a choice. Why must we pay for something we never chose, while protection for a desire is made freely accessible?' She went on to describe how girls from low-income families often resort to cloth in place of sanitary products, with limited awareness of reproductive health and a sense of shame surrounding what is, in fact, a natural process.

Another participant, Jampel, offered a complementary perspective, noting that limited access to contraception contributes to teenage pregnancies that have caused several of his peers to drop out of school. 'If condoms were available not just in BHUs but in schools and public spaces,' he reflected, 'some of them would still be in school and sitting with us here today.' In a later session he illustrated the difficulty of cultivating civic responsibility through a hypothetical scenario: a classroom lightbulb that one person continuously replaces while everyone else ignores it, and that no one feels safe reporting for fear of retaliation. The example resonated widely and prompted a substantive deliberation on how to encourage civic-mindedness and peer-to-peer learning in environments often shaped by silence, fear, or bullying. Suggestions included student-led initiatives, peer counselling groups, and anonymous platforms for raising concerns and proposing solutions.



The summit concluded with the Stage for Change gallery walk, an interactive showcase in which students presented their proposals through posters, spoken-word poetry, skits, and visual storytelling. Participants then formed a circle and took a collective pledge to return to their schools and communities as engaged, responsible, and compassionate citizens. The discussions, the questions raised, and the proposals developed over the two days demonstrated that young Bhutanese are prepared to lead difficult conversations, hold space for differing views, and contribute to a society rooted in justice, care, and shared responsibility.

08

PROGRAMME 1

Situation Analysis for Community-Based Integrated Programming in Samtse, Chhukha and Dagana

77 young people aged 13–24

3 districts

6 thematic areas

Children and young people in Bhutan's poorer districts experience layered vulnerabilities that often go unheard in policy and programme design, even though their lived experience offers the most reliable evidence of what is and is not working.

In April and May, a situation analysis brought together young people aged thirteen to twenty-four in the districts of Samtse, Chhukha, and Dagana, which together account for 21 per cent of Bhutan's children, approximately 46,182 individuals identified as experiencing diverse vulnerabilities under the Multidimensional Poverty Index. Thirty-seven young people participated from six gewogs in Samtse (Dumtoed, Dophuchen, Tading, Namgaychhoeling, Norgaygang, and Sangngagchoeling), with a further twenty participants each in Dagana and Chhukha.



The consultations were structured around six thematic areas: education; health and nutrition; poverty; protection from social and sexual abuse; water, sanitation, hygiene, and climate change; and participation in decision-making. Using participatory tools such as the Problem Tree Analysis and the Frequency-Severity Matrix, participants reflected on their lived realities and proposed solutions to the challenges they face.

For many of the young people involved, this was the first time their views had been formally sought on these issues. As Aruna, an eighteen-year-old student from Peljorling Higher Secondary School in Samtse, observed: 'I didn't know how to say these things before. But now I feel confident. We never got the platform to share our problems. We feel heard.'

The findings revealed systemic gaps with disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups, particularly children from low-income families, girls, and children with disabilities.

> I didn't know how to say these things before. But now I feel confident. We feel heard.
>
> **— Aruna, 18, Peljorling Higher Secondary School**

Education. Participants cited a shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in science and mathematics, alongside teacher attrition, inadequate school infrastructure, the remoteness of many schools, and a severe lack of quality learning resources, including outdated textbooks, broken computers, insufficient science laboratory equipment, and limited internet access. 'We don't have a maths teacher this term, so we just sit in class and do nothing,' one student observed. Poor toilet hygiene and limited privacy and safety in hostels were widespread concerns, with many students living as paying guests in private accommodation, often without adult supervision, leaving them vulnerable to substance abuse and teenage pregnancy. Students further described classroom discrimination in which English-speaking and academically strong pupils were favoured while struggling students faced neglect and ridicule.

Health and nutrition. Adolescents raised concerns about the quality and hygiene of hostel meals, citing repetitive use of potatoes, the absence of fruit, and the presence of insects in food. Stress and depression were widely reported, linked to bullying, gossip, academic pressure, and exclusion.

Poverty. Financial hardship within families restricted access to food, education, and basic necessities such as housing, clothing, and school supplies. Many households lacked access to social protection services as a result of procedural and language barriers, stigma, and misinformation. Children from impoverished or alcohol-affected households were noted as particularly vulnerable to neglect and abuse.

Child protection. Adolescents and youth shared accounts of bullying, online abuse, and verbal harassment, including from teachers. The absence of trusted, confidential reporting mechanisms left many feeling isolated and unprotected. Teenage pregnancy was a recurring concern, with participants describing limited relationship guidance and environments in which abuse could occur. Several participants spoke of early marriages resulting from academic failure or peer pressure, alongside limited understanding of consent and gendered expectations that placed unfair blame on girls for instances of harassment. Bullying, both online and offline, was a near-universal experience, intensified by the digital environment and rarely reported due to fear of retaliation and the absence of trusted counsellors.



Water, sanitation, hygiene, and climate change. Many students, particularly girls in boarding schools, reported having no water in toilets or being required to use dirty tap water. Skin infections, urinary tract infections, and frequent illness were attributed to limited access to clean drinking water and poor sanitation. Girls described the difficulties of managing menstruation without adequate facilities. Waste management and food insecurity were further concerns, with climate-related crop failures exacerbating food scarcity in poorer households.

Participation in decision-making. Most young people had never heard of their right to participate in decision-making and assumed that they were too young to attend community meetings or provide feedback. Even youth leaders described their roles as largely administrative and limited to enforcing school rules. Most were unfamiliar with local governance structures and had never been consulted on community development. The pattern reflects a deeply internalised culture of adultism in which civic life is understood as the preserve of adults.

Despite the gravity of these findings, the consultation itself represented an important shift. Young people emerged with greater awareness, confidence, and a sense that their experience matters. Their insights, now documented, will inform integrated programming interventions intended to improve the well-being of children and young people across the three districts. The exercise demonstrated that when children and young people are given the space to speak and the tools to engage, they can be powerful contributors to the policies and services that affect their lives.

09

PROGRAMME 1

Strengthening Civil Society's Voice in Policy through Research Grants

4 CSOs selected

10 month research grants

Civil society organisations are well placed to surface evidence and perspectives that might otherwise remain absent from policy discussions, particularly on issues affecting under-represented and marginalised groups.



In June, four civil society organisations, the Bhutan Toilet Organisation (BTO), the Disabled People's Organisation of Bhutan (DPOB), Nazhoen Lamtoen,

and the Organisation for Youth Empowerment (OYE), were selected as recipients of a competitive grant scheme designed to support research-based policy engagement. A grant agreement signing and orientation session formally launched their work, which will run over a ten-month implementation period.



The grant scheme is designed to support CSOs in conducting research that contributes to the development of thematic policy briefs aligned with their organisational missions and areas of focus. The initiative aims to enhance the analytical capacities of CSOs and to promote the use of evidence-based approaches in their engagement with policymakers and decision-makers.

The four selected projects address three core thematic areas: education and youth; gender and vulnerable groups; and health and sanitation. Through this work, the participating CSOs will produce research and policy briefs that draw on their respective fields of expertise and the lived experience of the constituencies they serve.



Continued dialogue and collaboration among the participating organisations will strengthen coordination, build mutual trust, and contribute to a more sustainable framework for evidence-based policy engagement and inclusive democratic practice in Bhutan.

10

PROGRAMME 1

Youth Initiative: The Ripple Camp

30	young Bhutanese
5	days
5	priority issues

Bhutanese youth are increasingly aware of the social and policy challenges affecting their generation, yet remain largely outside the formal spaces in which policy is debated and decided. Closing that gap requires structured opportunities for young people to develop their capacities and contribute directly to the decisions that shape their lives.



Over five days in July, thirty young Bhutanese drawn from diverse socio-economic, educational, and regional backgrounds participated in the Youth Initiative Camp 2025, also known as the Ripple Camp. The programme combined interactive workshops, experiential learning, and direct engagement with Bhutan's legislative institutions, with the aim of strengthening youth capacity in civic engagement, leadership, advocacy, and policy-making.

> Standing where national decisions are made gave me a deeper appreciation for governance and civic responsibility.
>
> **— Ripple Camp participant**

Workshops introduced participants to Bhutan's political structures and built practical skills in advocacy, communication, and problem-solving. Sessions on Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights addressed reproductive health, teenage pregnancy, early marriage, and youth-friendly services, while media literacy modules examined the influence of social media, the spread of misinformation, and the role of empathy in community life. Participants then visited the National Assembly and the National Council, where question and answer sessions allowed direct engagement with Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff. As one participant reflected, 'Standing where national decisions are made gave me a deeper appreciation for governance and civic responsibility.'



Drawing on their lived experience and using tools such as Problem-Tree Analysis, Stakeholder Mapping, and Action Plan Design, participants identified five priority issues affecting Bhutanese youth and proposed responses at individual, community, and national levels. These covered substance abuse and youth clubbing, exclusion from decision-making, sexual and reproductive health alongside teenage pregnancy and early marriage, discrimination against arts stream students, and youth unemployment and gang involvement. Their proposals ranged from accessible counselling, peer-led SRHR education, and confidence-building initiatives to civic education and leadership training, the establishment of youth committees at gewog and dzongkhag levels, the institutionalisation of a Youth Voice Parliament, the integration of Comprehensive Sexuality Education into school curricula, and the strengthening of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Gyalsung pathways.



The recommendations developed during the camp have been formally submitted for consideration in relevant national consultations. Participants concluded the programme with greater confidence, practical analytical tools, and a deeper understanding of Bhutan's democratic processes, and several have begun adapting peer-led campaigns and mentorship plans for their own communities. The camp also formed a network of young leaders across dzongkhags committed to supporting one another in advocacy, volunteering, and policy work, and demonstrated that Bhutanese youth are not only aware of the challenges facing their generation but are equally capable of designing practical solutions to address them.

11

PROGRAMME 1

Youth Summit: Voices for Change

45 students aged 13–18

3 outputs for policymakers

In July, forty-five students aged thirteen to eighteen from schools across Bhutan participated in the 2025 Youth Summit, an interactive programme designed to give them a structured platform to voice their perspectives on the social challenges affecting their communities and to engage directly with parliamentarians on issues of national policy. A recurring theme throughout the summit was the limited space available for young people, particularly those under the age of eighteen, to participate meaningfully in governance processes such as the zomdue. Through participatory exercises, including a symbolic 'Bza-Zam Bridge' activity in which participants designed one half of a metaphorical structure representing youth engagement with elected leaders, students identified the principal barriers to their inclusion: age-based exclusion, communication gaps with policymakers, the absence of accessible platforms, and adult-centric mindsets. They proposed enabling environments in which children and youth could observe local government meetings, mentorship to support civic learning, and the translation of governance materials into child-friendly formats and languages.

Using community mapping, gender analysis, public service delivery assessments, and a prioritisation matrix, participants then identified a wider set of concerns:

- High rural drop-out rates and subject-specific teacher shortages in education
- Inaccessible public transport and infrastructure for persons with disabilities



- The under-representation of women in leadership and decision-making
- Limited rural healthcare, and academic pressures contributing to rising rates of youth stress and self-harm
- The unregulated sale of alcohol and tobacco to minors, and easy access to marijuana
- Unsafe playground equipment, dilapidated school furniture, and contaminated recreational waters
- Irresponsible water use, limited agricultural knowledge among young people, and pollution

The solutions they proposed were equally concrete:

- Solar-powered learning tools for rural schools
- Fifty-fifty gender representation in decision-making bodies
- Disability-friendly public infrastructure
- Full-time counsellors in schools



- Standardising curriculum changes to a five-year cycle
- Stronger community–police partnerships to address substance abuse

Participants also developed 'dream community plans' integrating inclusion, sustainability, and participation, and presented their proposals directly to parliamentarians on the final day of the summit.

The summit produced three substantive outputs, a comprehensive report, a thematic policy brief, and a school and community-specific report, which together distil the participants' findings into policy-relevant recommendations for government ministries, local leaders, and civil society. The exercise demonstrated that young Bhutanese can move beyond passive participation to become active contributors to policy dialogue, and that the participatory methodologies they used can equip them with the analytical and advocacy skills required of future democratic leaders.

12

PROGRAMME 1

Empowering Teachers on Media and Information Literacy

12 educators | **5** days | **7–11 Jul** 2025

If young Bhutanese are to navigate a fast-evolving media landscape with confidence and discernment, the educators who guide them must first be equipped with the knowledge and tools to teach these skills. From 7 to 11 July 2025, twelve participants, including school principals, Media and Democracy Club coordinators, and teachers from Samtse, Trongsa, and Trashigang, took part in the second cohort of a five-day residential Training of Trainers on Media and Information Literacy in Trongsa.



The training was designed to strengthen the capacity of educators to promote media literacy, critical thinking, responsible digital engagement, and student voice through school-based Media and Democracy Clubs. Participants were introduced to foundational concepts in Media and Information Literacy, including misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and information disorder. They also examined how media ownership, digital manipulation, and online platforms shape public discourse and influence how citizens access, interpret, and respond to information.

> Media is more than entertainment. It is a powerful tool to promote democracy.
>
> **— Sonam Jigme, Principal, Langthil Lower Secondary School**

The programme combined conceptual learning with practical skills development. Workshops on news writing, photo storytelling, and mobile-based vlogging enabled participants to build the technical skills needed to guide students in responsible media creation. Sessions on facilitation, peer teaching, role plays, and collaborative planning further prepared participants to conduct MDC sessions that are dynamic, inclusive, participatory, and student-driven.

On the final day, participants took part in a visioning exercise and committed to concrete goals for revitalising or launching Media and Democracy Clubs in their schools by September 2025. Their plans focused on integrating media and information literacy into classroom teaching, supporting student-led media activities, and creating safe spaces for students to express their views, ask questions, and engage with issues affecting their communities.



Reflecting on the training, Mr Sonam Jigme, Principal of Langthil Lower Secondary School in Trongsa, said, 'Media is more than entertainment. It is a powerful tool to promote democracy, shape opinions, and build informed communities.' Other participants highlighted the urgency of guiding students towards ethical and responsible social media use in the face of rising misinformation. Several also expressed their intention to engage students in media creation as a way to build confidence, critical thinking, and civic awareness.

Overall, the training helped build a pool of educators who can support young people to become more informed, responsible, and active participants in Bhutan's democratic and digital public life.

13

PROGRAMME 1

CSO-Media Round Table Meet

51 participants

14 Aug Thimphu

Civil society organisations and the media share a common role in advancing transparent, accountable, and inclusive development. However, engagement between the two sectors in Bhutan has often remained informal, issue-based, and ad hoc. To address this gap, BCMD convened the CSO and Media Engagement Forum on 14 August 2025 in Thimphu under the theme, 'Fostering Media-CSO Synergy for People-Centred Development and Democratic Engagement'. The forum brought together 51 participants representing civil society organisations, the media, development partners, and the CSO Authority Secretariat. It was designed as a platform for open dialogue, mutual learning, and collective reflection on how civil society and the media can work together more strategically to strengthen public accountability, civic participation, and people-centred development.



The Journalist Association of Bhutan presented findings from two nationwide studies on Bhutan's media landscape and public perceptions of the press. The presentation highlighted key challenges related to press freedom, transparency, public trust, and media sustainability, while also offering recommendations for building a more inclusive, credible, and resilient media sector. The CSO Authority Secretariat presented the regulatory frameworks and institutional mechanisms that support accountability and integrity within the CSO sector, including the Bhutan Civil Society Accountability Standards.

A draft CSO and Media Engagement Strategy was also introduced during the forum. The strategy aims to deepen collaboration, mutual understanding, and strategic partnership between the two sectors by providing a more structured basis for engagement. It also highlighted the need for responsible information-sharing, ethical storytelling, and stronger coordination between journalists and civil society actors.

A focused round table discussion examined the current state of CSO-media engagement and the barriers that continue to constrain collaboration. Participants reflected on the need to move beyond transactional engagement, where the media is approached only for coverage, towards more meaningful partnerships grounded in trust, shared purpose, and public interest. The discussion also explored ways to advance human-centred storytelling, promote responsible advocacy, and develop joint initiatives that support transparency, accountability, and inclusive development.



The forum reaffirmed the shared role of civil society and the media in shaping Bhutan's development narrative within a democratic framework. It created an important space for both sectors to recognise their complementarities, identify practical areas for collaboration, and strengthen their collective contribution to informed public dialogue and socio-economic progress.

14

PROGRAMME 1

Stakeholder Consultation Meeting on Strengthening Child Protection Mechanisms in Bhutan

26 Aug national consultation

On 26 August 2025, a national stakeholder consultation was held to strengthen child protection mechanisms in Bhutan. The meeting brought together representatives from government agencies, civil society organisations, the judiciary, the media, and other relevant stakeholders to examine gaps in the current child protection system and identify practical recommendations for improved coordination, prevention, reporting, and response.

The consultation highlighted that effective child protection requires coordinated action across multiple sectors. Participants noted that fragmented mandates, siloed information systems, and inconsistent practices continue to create gaps through which vulnerable children may be left unsupported. Discussions focused on the need to strengthen institutional coordination, improve legal and public awareness, and ensure that child protection is understood not only as a welfare concern, but also as a national development and governance priority.



A key area of discussion was the role of the media in reporting child protection cases. Participants cautioned against sensational reporting that can further harm victims and their families, and emphasised the importance of victim-centred reporting that protects the dignity, privacy, and identity of children. The discussion also highlighted the need for clearer media guidelines, improved legal literacy among journalists, and careful judgement when reporting on perpetrators, particularly in cases involving children.

Participants also raised concerns about child protection within schools and communities. Growing mistrust among students was identified as an important concern, with stakeholders calling for teachers to be equipped as trained and trusted advocates for child protection. The need to strengthen civic awareness and child rights education within school curricula was also emphasised, so that young people are better able to understand their rights, recognise risks, and seek support when needed.

The consultation further underscored the importance of inclusion. Stakeholders noted that rural children and children with disabilities must be made more visible in child protection policies, systems, and practices. Participants referred to cases involving persons with communication disabilities to illustrate how vulnerable individuals may face barriers in reporting abuse, providing testimony, and accessing justice. This reinforced the need for child protection mechanisms that are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to diverse needs.



Emerging risks were also discussed. Digital platforms were identified as a growing site of exploitation, with participants noting that platform restrictions alone are insufficient without broader digital

literacy and online safety education. Climate change was also acknowledged as an emerging factor that can increase child vulnerability, particularly in communities affected by displacement, livelihood stress, or disruption to services.

A major systems-level concern was the absence of a structured mechanism for vetting individuals working with children. Drawing on recent cases, participants discussed the possible introduction of a 'Working with Children Check' within the existing security clearance process, as well as the development of a sexual offender registry. The Royal Bhutan Police and the judiciary noted the potential value of such measures, while also emphasising the need for a Bhutanese approach that balances deterrence, accountability, and rehabilitation.

The consultation also identified the lack of a centralised child protection database as a significant institutional gap. Existing systems, including the CMIS and the judiciary's case management system, were described as operating in silos and facing limitations in functionality, security, and effectiveness. The GovTech Agency indicated its readiness to support reforms, while noting that line agencies must lead and own the process.



The consultation resulted in several priority recommendations. These included establishing a national vetting and tracking mechanism for individuals working with children; designating the National Commission for Women and Children as the lead monitoring authority; clarifying the respective roles of civil society organisations, the Royal Bhutan Police, and the judiciary; formalising inter-agency coordination frameworks; developing national media guidelines with child-sensitive reporting protocols; strengthening gewog-level child protection committees and school-based safeguarding teams; and mainstreaming child protection within Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan as a national development priority.

Overall, the consultation created an important platform for stakeholders to move beyond sector-specific concerns and identify coordinated measures to strengthen Bhutan's child protection system. It reinforced the need for stronger institutions, responsible media practice, inclusive protection mechanisms, and sustained collaboration to ensure that every child is protected, heard, and supported.

15

PROGRAMME 1

Peer-Facilitation Workshop for Local Government Leaders of Tsirang Dzongkhag

13 participants | 3 days | Tsirang Dzongkhag

BCMD conducted a three-day Peer Facilitation Workshop in Tsirang Dzongkhag with 13 participants, including Gewog Administrative Officers, district officials, and BCMD staff. The workshop was designed to strengthen the facilitation skills of local government officials so that community consultations, chiwog zomdus, and planning meetings can become more inclusive, participatory, and responsive to diverse voices.

The workshop focused on the core principles and practice of facilitation, with particular attention to neutrality, inclusivity, trust-building, active listening, and participatory decision-making. Participants reflected on the difference between leading, presenting, training, and facilitating. This distinction helped many recognise that local government meetings often become spaces for information-sharing rather than genuine consultation. Through this reflection, participants began to see facilitation as a practice that requires preparation, openness, and the ability to guide discussions without dominating them.



A major area of learning was the importance of creating safe spaces for participation. Participants agreed that respect, confidentiality, receptiveness, and acknowledgement of diverse voices are essential if community members are to feel comfortable sharing their views. This was particularly relevant to chiwog and gewog-level consultations, where women, children, persons with disabilities, and quieter participants may be physically present but not meaningfully heard. One Gewog Administrative Officer reflected that while invitations are often sent to different groups, further effort is needed to ensure that persons with disabilities and other underrepresented community members are able to participate in practice.

> In most cases, we informed people rather than genuinely consulting them.
>
> **— Leki Choida, Gewog Administrative Officer**

The workshop also helped participants examine the limitations of conventional decision-making processes. Many acknowledged that community decisions are sometimes shaped by dominant voices or by those who are more outspoken, while quieter participants remain excluded. Through sessions on active listening, managing group dynamics, balancing participation, and structured decision-making, participants explored practical ways to make consultations more inclusive. These tools included summarising, stacking, making space, balancing, managing group dynamics, and debriefing. Participants discussed how these methods could be applied in weekly gewog meetings, chiwog consultations, and development planning processes.

A key shift in understanding was captured by Leki Choida, Gewog Administrative Officer, who reflected, 'Until now, I realise that while we have held many meetings and shared information with the people in our chiwog, we have not truly facilitated discussions. In most cases, we informed people rather than genuinely consulting them. Today, I understood that it is equally important not only to disseminate information but also to listen carefully to the voices and opinions of the public.' This reflection highlighted the workshop's central message: facilitation is not simply about bringing people together, but about creating the conditions for meaningful participation, listening, and collective decision-making.



The workshop further introduced participants to the three interconnected dimensions of facilitation: process, relationship, and result. Participants recognised that effective facilitation requires careful preparation, time management, trust-building, and clarity on expected outcomes. They also explored the stages of group dynamics and reflected on how facilitators can support groups through disagreement, dialogue, consensus-building, and closure.

By the end of the workshop, participants identified practical changes they could introduce into their own work, including sharing meeting agendas in advance, using clearer and simpler language, creating space for quieter voices, managing time more effectively, and conducting debrief sessions after meetings. These practices were recognised as simple but important steps towards making local government consultations more transparent, inclusive, and community-owned.

Overall, the Peer Facilitation Workshop reaffirmed that inclusive planning depends not only on the tools used, but also on the quality of facilitation. By strengthening the ability of local government officials to listen actively, manage group dynamics, and encourage diverse participation, the workshop contributed to BCMD's broader effort to make community consultation processes more democratic, inclusive, and responsive to local needs.

16

PROGRAMME 1

GNH-Based Participatory Planning and Community Analysis Workshop

37 local government leaders

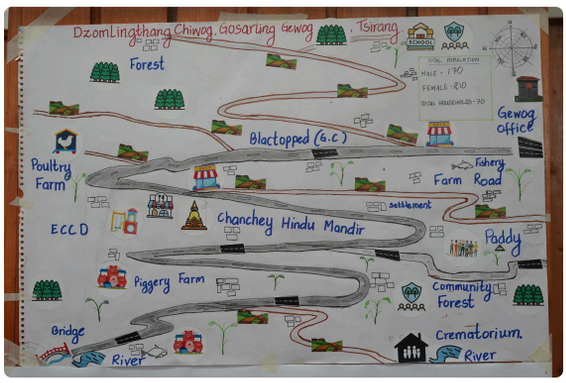
12 gewogs

7–13 Oct 2025

From 7 to 13 October 2025, BCMD conducted a GNH-Based Participatory Planning and Community Analysis Workshop with 37 local government leaders from the 12 gewogs of Tsirang Dzongkhag. The workshop aimed to strengthen local leaders' capacity to use participatory planning tools, analyse community priorities, and support more inclusive and evidence-based decision-making at the local level.

The workshop began with a reflection on Bhutan's local governance system and the realities of decentralisation in practice. Participants examined local government rules, planning and budgeting processes, and the flow of communication between the Chiwog, Gewog, and Dzongkhag levels. While local governments have been empowered to plan and prioritise development within their communities, participants noted that challenges such as geographical remoteness, logistical constraints, un-

clear agenda setting, weak documentation, limited advance communication, and citizen fatigue continue to affect meaningful participation. One participant reflected, 'It is difficult to get community participation during chiwog zomdu meetings. Many people attend only if there are direct benefits for them.'



A major focus of the workshop was the introduction of eight participatory planning tools under four GNH themes. Through Gewog-based group exercises, participants applied these tools to analyse social and economic conditions, stakeholder relationships, gender dynamics, and public service delivery challenges. They identified issues related to livelihoods, livestock services, water scarcity, farm roads, infrastructure, market access, pricing disparities, and the vulnerability of rural communities dependent on agriculture and livestock.

The workshop also helped participants better understand planning procedures under the Local Development Planning Manual 2021 and clarified the roles of local government actors involved in agenda setting, prioritisation, and proposal development. Sessions on stakeholder mapping and influence analysis enabled participants to identify key actors, power dynamics, and opportunities for stronger coordination among Tshogpas, Gups, Dzongkhag officials, sector agencies, civil society organisations, and community institutions.



Gender and inclusion were central to the discussions. Participants examined why women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other groups may be present in community meetings but still have limited influence over decisions. Using tools such as gender situation analysis and the 'But Why' method, they explored root causes related to cultural norms, mobility constraints, care responsibilities, and limited confidence in public participation.

By the end of the workshop, participants had developed inclusive community development plans, which they presented during plenary sessions. As a follow-up, they will work with communities in their respective gewogs to further refine these plans, which will be showcased during a Town Hall in December. Overall, the workshop strengthened local government leaders' ability to move beyond routine consultation towards more participatory, inclusive, and community-owned planning.

17

PROGRAMME 1

Citizen Empowerment Workshop

12 gewogs of Tsirang

13–18 Oct 2025

Communities cannot fully thrive when citizens remain spectators in the decisions that shape their everyday lives, and yet meaningful citizen participation in local development planning continues to fall short of what Bhutan's decentralisation framework envisions.



From 13 to 18 October 2025, a Citizen Empowerment Workshop brought together farmers, youth, women, and former local government leaders across the twelve gewogs of Tsirang to reflect on how citizen voice can shape decision-making in their communities.



Discussions revealed that while citizens are often informed about decisions, they are seldom consulted in any substantive way on community needs, the availability and allocation of budgets, or upcoming plans and programmes. A consistent pattern emerged of engagement that is procedural rather than participatory: the structures for public consultation exist, but many citizens regard these meetings as administrative obligations rather than as opportunities to influence development. The pattern points to a deeper need for civic empowerment in which citizens recognise both their right and their responsibility to contribute to decisions that affect them.



The workshop sought to support that shift, encouraging citizens to move from passive listeners to active participants who engage constructively with local government leaders in shaping priorities and decisions. Sessions also revisited the reciprocal obligations between the State and its citizens, situating problem-solving as a shared task in which interventions are most effective when they reflect community needs and values, and most sustainable when communities feel a genuine sense of ownership over them.

18

PROGRAMME 1

Media and Democracy Clubs (MDC) Citizen Journalism Training: Monitoring and Evaluation

220+ students and teachers

2 schools in Samtse

22–26 Oct 2025

For young Bhutanese growing up in a digital information environment, the skills to recognise misinformation, share responsibly, and tell stories from their own communities are increasingly fundamental to civic life.



From 22 to 26 October 2025, more than two hundred and twenty students and teachers at Dorokha Central School and Peljorling Higher Secondary School in Samtse participated in citizen journalism training organised through the Media and Democracy Clubs (MDCs). The sessions were facilitated by teachers who had previously undergone the Training of Trainers, ensuring that media literacy capacity is being sustained within schools through a peer-led approach.

> We used to believe everything we saw on Facebook, but now we are more careful.
>
> **— Jharna Thapa, Class 10 student**

Students explored the foundations of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) and citizen journalism through interactive sessions, photography, videography, and story development exercises. The workshops combined theory with practical application, helping students recognise misinformation, apply ethical journalism principles, and produce stories drawn from their own communities. At Dorokha Central School, students applied these skills to real-life issues, including local flood reporting, while at Peljorling Higher Secondary School, where 124 students and eight staff members took part, sessions also covered responsible sharing, interview techniques, and content creation.



The shift in participants' understanding was tangible. As Jharna Thapa, a Class 10 student, observed: 'We used to believe everything we saw on Facebook, but now we are more careful.' The MDC Coordinator at Peljorling Higher Secondary School similarly reflected that 'students have become more responsible digital citizens and aware of their role in promoting constructive discussions online.'



The trainings underscored the importance of continued mentorship, peer learning, and access to digital resources if MDCs are to sustain their engagement over time. With sustained guidance and support, the clubs are well placed to serve as platforms for nurturing informed, ethical, and responsible youth voices in Bhutan's evolving media landscape.

19

PROGRAMME 1

Civic Engagement Workshop for Youth, Local Government Leaders and Women

25 participants

3–5 Dec 2025

Inclusive local governance depends on citizens who understand how decisions are made and feel both entitled and equipped to participate, yet many community members still regard local government processes as the preserve of officials rather than as spaces in which their own voices belong.



From 3 to 5 December 2025, twenty-five participants representing community-based organisations, youth, and local government leaders from Trongsa and Pemagatshel took part in a three-day workshop on civic engagement. The workshop sought to deepen understanding of the principles of citizen participation, strengthen the capacity of women and community members in inclusive planning, and build stronger networks among women's groups, youth, and local government institutions in support of a collective voice for community development.

> So far, we youth have never participated in any community meetings. I will henceforth participate.
>
> **— Tashi, youth participant**

The workshop served as much to demystify local governance as to build new capacities. Local government leaders themselves observed that, in practice, Dzongkhag and Gewog planning processes are often conducted simultaneously, despite the requirement that Gewog plans precede

Dzongkhag-level planning. Participants also surfaced a widespread misunderstanding of the Dzongkhag Finance Committee's role, having previously assumed that the Committee approves activities before they are tabled at the Dzongkhag Tshogdu. Many participants also recognised, for the first time, that the Chiwog Zomdue is a legitimate and accessible entry point for engaging in local development processes, and that Dzongkhag Tshogdu and Gewog Tshogde meetings are open to ordinary citizens. As one participant observed: 'Having heard of GT and DT, the notion was that ordinary people could not attend such sessions, but now it has been made clear that participation is open to all.' The workshop reinforced the importance of inclusive participation, particularly by women and youth in local governance. Participants noted persistent gender imbalances in leadership and decision-making, and youth participants in particular described the workshop as one of the few spaces in which their role in local governance had been explicitly acknowledged and valued. As Tashi, a youth participant, reflected: 'So far, we youth have never participated in any community meetings because we never understood the importance of our engagement. I will henceforth participate in the upcoming community meetings.'



Across the three days, participants moved from understanding their rights and responsibilities in local governance to committing to act on them, with several speaking of the importance of replacing dependence on the State with shared effort. The strengthened networks among women's groups, youth, and local government institutions are expected to support more meaningful participation and more collaborative problem-solving at the grassroots level in the months ahead.

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BHUTAN CENTRE
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY



PROGRAMME

2

Creating Knowledge Resources for Citizens

PUBLISHED TWICE A YEAR

The Druk Journal

A space for Bhutanese thinkers, policymakers and scholars to reflect on the ideas shaping the nation. In 2025, two issues explored the climate crisis and the idea of mindful governance.



01

SPRING 2025 · VOLUME 11, ISSUE I

Spring Issue: Climate Change in Bhutan: Impact and Response

The Spring 2025 issue of The Druk Journal (Volume 11, Issue I) took as its theme 'Climate Change in Bhutan: Impact and Response'. Bhutan is a small, carbon-negative country, yet it faces the consequences of a warming planet shaped largely by emissions beyond its control. The issue examines the challenges, impacts, and responses shaping Bhutan's climate future, with in-depth discussion of scientific projections, economic vulnerability, cultural understanding, and policy action. Its fifteen articles, written by scientists, negotiators, researchers, economists, and scholars, set out their views on every aspect of Bhutan's effort to adapt to and respond to a changing climate.

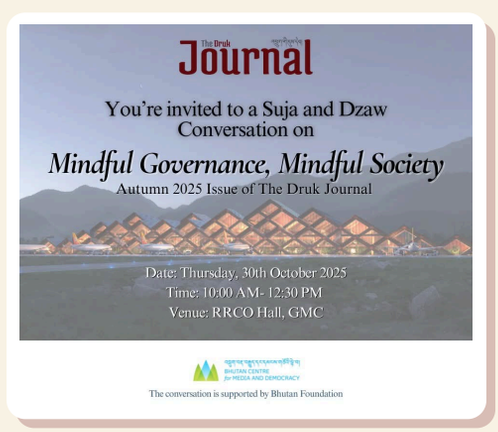
15 articles by scientists, negotiators, researchers, economists and scholars

02

AUTUMN 2025 · VOLUME 11, ISSUE II

Autumn Issue: Mindful Governance, Mindful Society

The Autumn 2025 issue of The Druk Journal (Volume 11, Issue II) took as its theme 'Mindful Governance, Mindful Society'. As Bhutan advances the Gelephu Mindfulness City and seeks to root its development in the country's spiritual and cultural traditions, mindfulness is emerging as a defining principle for how the nation governs itself and organises public life. The issue explores mindfulness as it applies to governance, institutions, and society, with in-depth discussion of leadership, justice, education, and public well-being. Its seventeen articles, written by scholars, policymakers, educators, and public thinkers, offer their perspectives on building a mindful nation for the twenty-first century.



17 articles by scholars, policymakers, educators and public thinkers

03

PROGRAMME 2

Suja & Dzaw Conversation on Climate Change in Bhutan: Impact and Response

~95 participants

8 May Lobesa

Bhutan stands in a paradoxical position on climate change. The country is proudly carbon-negative and yet increasingly exposed to the consequences of a warming planet shaped by emissions over which it has very little influence.

On 8 May 2025, around ninety-five participants, including students and faculty from the College of Natural Resources, Punakha Central School, and Ugyen Academy, gathered at the College of Natural Resources in Lobesa for a Suja and Dzaw Conversation on the twenty-first edition of The Druk Journal, 'Climate Change in Bhutan: Impact and Response'. Moderated by the journal's editor, Dasho Kinley Dorji, the conversation drew on contributions from four of the fifteen authors of the issue.



Tashi Choden, Planning Officer in the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, presented Bhutan's role in the G-Zero forum, an alliance among carbon-sink nations including Bhutan, Panama, Madagascar, and Suriname, designed to foster co-operation, advocate climate responsibility, and create a shared platform for experience-sharing. She outlined Bhutan's proposal to host the G-Zero Summit and to establish a secretariat in the country, with the Office of the Prime Minister exploring partner contributions to support its operations. Singay Dorji, Chief of the National Centre for Hydrology and Meteorology, presented scientific data on Bhutan's climate trends, with 2024 recorded as the warmest year on record and projections indicating more extreme weather events, particularly in the east of the country. Data from weather stations show rising temperatures and increased rainfall in central and northern regions, although socio-economic variability and uncertainties within General Circulation Models continue to limit the precision of projections. He underlined the importance of localised data, strengthened early warning systems, and the integration of scientific findings into national policy.

> What stood out was how some speakers used storytelling to explain complex issues.
>
> **— Rinchen Dema, College of Natural Resources**

Yangyel Lhaden, a reporter with Kuensel, drew on her experience covering COP29 to reflect on the Global South's demand for climate justice and financial support from developed countries, including the unmet $100 billion climate finance commitment, and the setback represented by the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. In the Bhutanese context, she emphasised that women are disproportionately affected by climate change, particularly through water scarcity, because of the gendered division of household responsibilities. Pema Eden, a PhD student at the College of Natural Resources, presented striking visual comparisons of Bhutan's glaciers between 2004 and 2024, with

shrinking snow lines and the increasing risk of glacial lake outburst flooding from sites such as Lugye Tsho. She drew attention to the consequences for downstream communities that depend on glacial water for agriculture, drinking water, and overall well-being.



The conversation surfaced both the inequity of Bhutan bearing the consequences of climate change despite minimal emissions, and the country's continued efforts to advance carbon neutrality through strategic planning and international collaboration, including the planned national secretariat and technical panels in preparation for COP-30 in 2026. Participants discussed the exploration of carbon trading mechanisms, improvements to early warning systems, and the persistent gaps in data accessibility and climate awareness at the grassroots level.

Recommendations from the conversation called for inclusive policy processes that involve civil society and marginalised sections of the community, particularly women, who are more vulnerable to climate impacts because of socio-cultural norms; stronger communication strategies to convey climate science to farmers and rural communities; community-led environmental initiatives, including waste management and the formalisation of scrap dealing, given that much of Bhutan's scrap and waste currently moves to India; deeper engagement with local communities in efforts such as stream adoption and clean-up, where short-term gains are often undone by limited civic consciousness; the establishment of baseline data on Bhutan's carbon footprint; school-based climate education that goes beyond textbook learning to cultivate genuine understanding and individual responsibility on issues such as littering and plastic use; and increased investment in adaptive infrastructure, including glacial lake outburst flood mitigation and drought resilience in vulnerable regions such as eastern Bhutan.



As one participant, Rinchen Dema, a fourth-year student of BSc Environment and Climate Studies at the College of Natural Resources, observed: 'The session was interactive and engaging, with each speaker bringing unique insights. What stood out was how some speakers used storytelling to explain complex issues, making the discussions more relatable and easier to understand.'

04

PROGRAMME 2

Second Suja & Dzaw Conversation on Climate Change in Bhutan: Impact and Response

120+ participants

15 Aug Kanglung

On 15 August 2025, more than one hundred and twenty participants, including former Members of Parliament, students, teachers, lecturers, and local officials, gathered at Sherubtse College in Kanglung for the second Suja and Dzaw Conversation on the twenty-first edition of The Druk Journal, 'Climate Change in Bhutan: Impact and Response'.



The speakers underscored Bhutan's active role in global climate negotiations alongside the persistent inadequacy of international climate finance, and pointed to the growing physical risks posed by glacial melt, drying springs, and floods. Despite the country's abundance of rivers, water insecurity is mounting, highlighting the need for stronger governance and a wider public understanding of water as a finite resource. Much of the discussion centred on the cryosphere and the cascading effects of glacier retreat, permafrost thaw, and glacial lake outbursts on ecosystems and livelihoods, reinforcing the importance of reliable scientific data and effective communication for public awareness. An ethnographic perspective further showed how climate change is disrupting traditions, sacred cycles, and community practices, and reminded participants that cultural wisdom and storytelling have a substantial role to play in shaping resilience and adaptation.

The audience response captured the reach of these themes. As one forestry official observed: 'We did learn about climate change from a very young age in school, but through this conversation we learnt how spiritually local peoples are affected, and how they think of climate change. We usually think of climate change in terms of temperature rise, but here we discussed how it impacts water and glaciers. In the short term, melting glaciers may benefit hydropower, but in the long term, sustainability will be very hard. As forestry personnel, we are doing everything we can to increase forest coverage and enhance carbon sequestration to contribute positively to climate change.'



The conversation concluded with a shared understanding that Bhutan's climate response requires stronger adaptation strategies in water management, agriculture, and disaster preparedness. Integrated resource management, improved governance, and youth education were identified as key priorities, alongside the cultivation of mindful consumption and ethical decision-making. The discussion left no doubt that collaboration among scientists, policymakers, and communities is not only desirable but essential if Bhutan is to respond effectively to the profound challenges that climate change presents.

05

PROGRAMME 2

Suja & Dzaw Conversation: Mindful Governance, Mindful Society

~270 Pelsups

30 Oct Gelephu

Mindfulness, increasingly invoked in global conversations on leadership and well-being, sits at the heart of Bhutanese cultural and spiritual life, but its translation into governance and public institutions is a less settled question.



On 30 October 2025, around two hundred and seventy Pelsups in Gelephu took part in a public conversation on the latest issue of The Druk Journal, 'Mindful Governance, Mindful Society'. Moderated by the journal's editor, Dasho Kinley Dorji, the conversation drew on reflections from contributors including Lopon Lungtaen Gyatsho, Ms Phub Dem, Dr Joel and Michelle Levey, and Siok Sian Pek.



> With this level of awareness and commitment, I am confident that Pelsups will meaningfully contribute to GMC's development.
>
> **— Phub Dem, Pelsung Programme**

The discussion treated mindfulness as a lived ethic rather than a passing trend, rooted in Bhutanese values of altruism, bodhicitta, service, and a sense of community. Participants reflected on how mindfulness might be integrated into governance, policies, and everyday practice, and on how it can be reconciled with the competitive demands of modern public and economic life. The conversation also engaged with the idea of mindful prosperity, recognising that material progress is most durable when it is anchored in social awareness and collective well-being. As global interest in mindfulness expands and diversifies, Bhutan's opportunity lies in preserving the spiritual roots of the tradition while building institutions and communities that embody mindful governance in practice.



Several Pelsups shared their own plans and ideas for popularising mindfulness in Gelephu. As Phub Dem, a participant in the Pelsung Programme, observed: 'The session was truly enriching. I was in-

spired by the curiosity and genuine concern shown by everyone. With this level of awareness and commitment, I am confident that Pelsups will meaningfully contribute to GMC's development.'

PROGRAMME 2 AT A GLANCE

2
issues of The Druk Journal

32
articles by Bhutanese thinkers

3
Suja & Dzaw Conversations

~485
participants across the conversations



འབྲུག་བར་བཙུད་དང་དམངས་གཙོའི་ལྷན་ཚོགས།
BHUTAN CENTRE
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

PROGRAMME

3

Media Lab – Enabling Citizen Voice

01

PROGRAMME 3

CSO Quarterly Meetings and the First Annual CSO Summit

45 participants in Punakha

35 CSOs at the second meeting

For Bhutan's civil society sector to play its full role in national development, alignment with the country's strategic priorities and stronger collaboration among CSOs and government institutions are equally essential.

On 6 and 7 February 2025, forty-five participants representing civil society organisations, the Civil Society Organizations Authority (CSOA), and development partners convened in Punakha for the Fourth CSO Quarterly Meet and the first Annual CSO Summit, providing an opportunity to engage on pressing issues, emerging challenges, and opportunities within the sector.



A central feature of the summit was a presentation from officials of the Cabinet Secretariat on the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan, giving participants a clearer view of the country's development priorities and the strategic role CSOs are expected to play in delivering them. Discussions on the Government of India's funding support for CSOs offered greater clarity on the funding mechanisms and processes available to the sector, and enabled participants to submit recommendations on the optimisation of fund allocation to maximise impact.

Beyond these policy deliberations, the summit also addressed the capacity-building needs of CSOs, reflecting a shared commitment to institutional strengthening and long-term sustainability. Through thematic discussions, participants explored how CSOs can contribute to a 'Future Bhutan' agenda, ensuring that civil society remains an active participant in the country's sustainable development.

The Annual CSO Summit marked a significant step in strengthening the civil society sector in Bhutan. By fostering collaboration, aligning sectoral effort with national development plans, and surfacing capacity challenges, the summit laid the foundation for more effective and impactful civil society engagement in the years ahead.



Representatives from thirty-five civil society organisations across Bhutan later convened in Thimphu for the second CSO Quarterly Meeting of the year, to review recent developments and discuss shared priorities for the sector.

The meeting opened with a brief update on the key outcomes of the previous Annual CSO Summit, helping to orient new and returning participants to ongoing discussions. A central agenda item was the presentation of the final draft of the CSO Bi-Annual Meeting and Annual Summit Guideline, prepared by the Handicraft Association of Bhutan, which integrated feedback from earlier consultations and was now placed before the wider CSO community for endorsement.

The CSO Authority Secretariat presented an overview of the Bhutan Civil Society Accountability Standard (BCAS) screening and evaluation process. In response, participants offered several practical suggestions, including simplifying docu-

mentation requirements, introducing a grace period for appeals related to missing submissions, accounting for the diverse capacities of organisations of different sizes in evaluations, and providing disaggregated performance data to help organisations identify their own areas for improvement.



Mr Hendrick Visser, Coordinator of the Wellbeing Thematic Group of CSOs, led a session on the evolving role of civil society within Bhutan's broader policy and development landscape, emphasising the need for early consultation between CSOs and the government during the formulation of laws and policies. To support this, participants proposed that relevant thematic CSO committees be allowed to formally seek engagement through the CSO Authority Secretariat for direct dialogue with policymakers. Participants also raised a shared concern regarding the imposition of overlapping penalties for late document submissions and annual renewals, calling for greater clarity and fairness in these processes.

As CSOs continue to navigate complex operational and governance challenges, the Quarterly Meeting reaffirmed the importance of sustained engagement, institutional support, and unified advocacy in strengthening Bhutan's civil society ecosystem as a cornerstone of a vibrant democracy.

02

PROGRAMME 3

Third CSO Quarterly Meeting

34 civil society organisations

12 Dec 2025

For Bhutan's civil society sector, sustained coordination among organisations is as important as the work each organisation undertakes individually, particularly on sector-wide issues such as financing, regulation, and the operating environment, which no single organisation can resolve alone.

On 12 December 2025, the third CSO Quarterly Meeting of the year convened representatives from thirty-four civil society organisations, alongside a member of the European Union Delegation, to deliberate on strategic priorities, operational challenges, and emerging opportunities for the sector.

The meeting reviewed progress against issues raised at the second Quarterly Meeting, including the streamlining and revision of the Bhutan Civil Society Accountability Standards (BCAS), the submission to the CSO Authority Secretariat of the Biannual CSO Meetings and Annual Summit Guideline, and the development of a CSO and Parliament Engagement Guideline. Participants reiterated long-standing concerns about endowment fund requirements, particularly the high taxation on fixed deposits and the disproportionate burden these requirements place on smaller organisations. With endowment funds of Nu. 30 lakh typically generating only around Nu. 17,500 in annual interest, participants proposed exploring social enterprise models to generate sustainable revenue, using interest from fixed deposits as seed funding for income-generating initiatives, and seeking clearer definitions of endowment fund requirements within the legal and guideline framework, particularly for smaller CSOs.

The session focused on the development of a five-year Bhutan CSO Roadmap, intended to guide the next phase of strategic engagement with the European Union and inform upcoming calls for pro-

posals. The roadmap will prioritise local CSOs, with international non-governmental organisations eligible to participate only through consortium arrangements with local partners. Financial sustainability emerged as the highest priority, followed by inadequate budgets to carry out organisational mandates, the absence of funding for social enterprise development, the need to enhance civic space, equal CSO representation on the CSO Authority Board, and capacity for resource mobilisation and advocacy. Proposed actions focused on promoting social enterprise models, establishing CSO endowment funds, strengthening fundraising, improving leadership and project management skills, and creating an enabling environment for civic engagement.

The priorities identified during the meeting will be consolidated into a report to inform the Bhutan CSO Roadmap and the next round of funding calls, with three core areas of emphasis: sustainability, strengthening the enabling environment, and capacity development across the CSO sector.

03

PROGRAMME 3

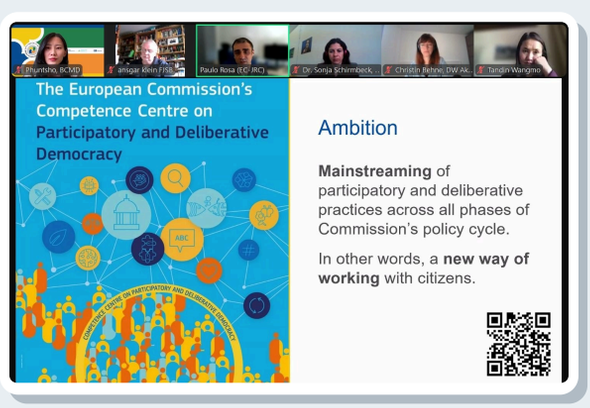
Virtual Exchange on Strengthening Good Governance

26 Mar 2025

Bhutan & Europe virtual exchange

As Bhutan continues to deepen its democratic practice, conversations that connect domestic experience with international thinking on citizen participation have become increasingly valuable.

On 26 March 2025, parliamentarians, civil society representatives, development partners, and members of the media gathered for a virtual exchange session on good governance, drawing on perspectives from Bhutan and Europe.



Dr Sonja Schirmbeck of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation made the case for democratic engagement built on political education, informed voting, and Citizens' Assemblies, an approach increasingly used to widen the voices shaping public decisions. Dr Ansger Klein of the German Federal Network for Civic Engagement examined the evolving role of civil society in Bhutan's democracy, with particular attention to youth and media engagement and the openings that exist for international cooperation. Dr Paulo Rosa and Mateusz Tokarski from the European Commission's Joint Research Centre introduced participatory democracy models, including citizen panels and the Young Citizens Assembly on Pollinators, illustrating how young people can be brought meaningfully into policymaking.

Participants reinforced the importance of collaboration among key stakeholders in fostering a more inclusive and participatory democratic process. The discussion also considered the role of social media in youth engagement and the need for mechanisms that draw vulnerable groups into the conversation rather than leave them outside it.

The exchange gave Bhutanese participants new reference points for ongoing efforts to strengthen democratic participation at home, and reaffirmed the value of cross-border learning in shaping that work.

PROGRAMME 3 AT A GLANCE

3
convenings for civil society

45
participants at the Punakha summit

35
CSOs at the second quarterly meeting

34
CSOs at the third quarterly meeting



Funding and Financial Overview

BCMD income and expenditure statement as of 31st December 2025

Income Received During the Year 2025

1	International Development Organisations	9,028,029.19
2	International Non-profit Organisations	18,921,187.22
3	Foundations	6,721,788.87
4	Annuity Income	2,545,548.44
5	Individual Contributions	2,147,669.50
6	Local Support/CSR	- .00
7	Miscellaneous Income	347,881.10

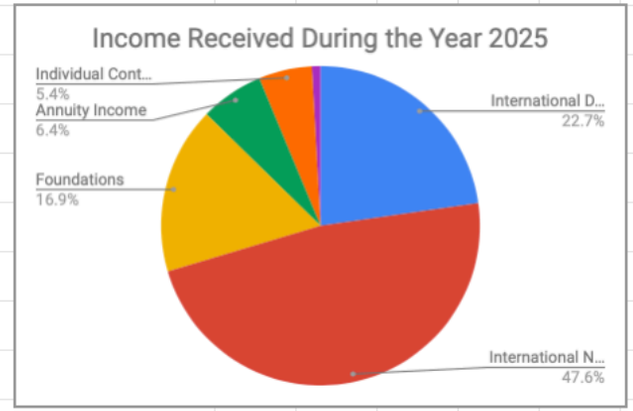
Expenditure Made During the Year 2025

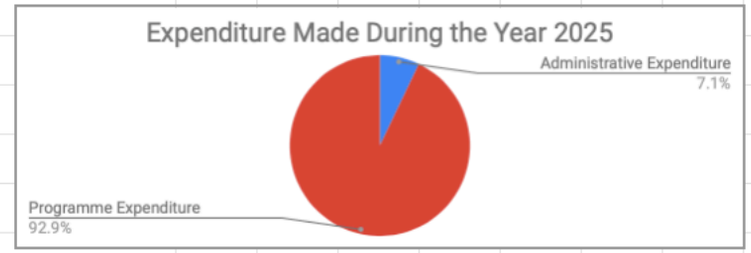
1	Administrative Expenditure	1,628,966.95
2	Programme Expenditure	21,230,522.20

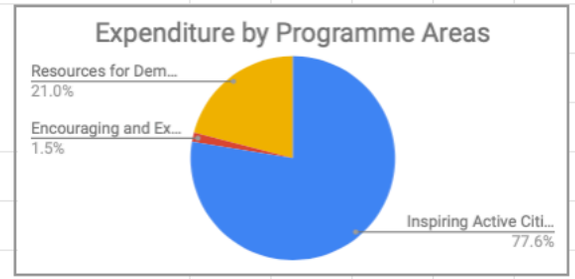
Expenditure by Programme Areas

1	Inspiring Active Citizens	12,073,790.78
2	Encouraging and Expanding Public Discourse	227,391.00
3	Resources for Democracy	3,262,295.68

Income Received During the Year 2025







Receipts and Payments Statement

BHUTAN CENTRE FOR MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY
RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS STATEMENT
FOR THE PERIOD FROM 01 JANUARY 2025 to 31 DECEMBER 2025

RECEIPTS	SCHEDULE	AMOUNT (NU.)		PAYMENTS	SCHEDULE	AMOUNT (NU.)	
		2025	2024			2025	2024
Opening Balances:		**19,869,614.74**	**9,192,994.82**	**Expenditures:**		**23,328,209.27**	**19,967,936.27**
Cash in Hand	1	-	-	Administrative Expenses	5	1,628,966.95	1,671,592.46
Cash at Bank		19,869,614.74	9,192,994.82	Programme Expenses	6	21,230,522.20	17,592,222.81
				Refund to Donor	7	468,720.12	74,171.00
Funds Received:		**58,460,524.89**	**30,644,556.19**	Purchase of Assets	8	-	629,950.00
International Development Org.	2	9,028,029.19	10,472,727.62				
International Non-profit Org.		18,921,187.22	5,404,779.74	**Fixed Deposits**	9	**25,003,490.64**	
Foundations		6,721,788.87	10,434,641.51				
Interest Earned		2,545,548.44	1,557,691.97	**Advance and Adjustment**	3	**339,698.00**	
Individual Contribution		2,147,669.50	2,194,591.60	**Recoveries and Remittences**	4	**1,023,943.46**	
Local Support/CSR		-	147,777.00				
Miscellaneous Income		347,881.10	432,346.75				
Fixed Deposit (Matured)		18,748,420.57	-	**Closing Balances:**		**30,016,762.91**	**19,869,614.74**
				Cash in Hand	10	-	-
Advance and Adjustment	3	**339,698.00**		Cash at Bank		30,016,762.91	19,869,614.74
Recoveries and Remittences	4	**1,042,266.65**					
TOTAL		**79,712,104.28**	**39,837,551.01**	**TOTAL**		**79,712,104.28**	**39,837,551.01**

(Manisha Khawas)
Finance Officer

BHUTAN CENTRE FOR MEDIA & DEMOCRACY

(Tandin Wangmo)
Executive Director

(Rosy Chettri)
Partner

Choezen and Associates

WITH GRATITUDE

Acknowledgements

BCMD is grateful to its donors, supporters and partners, and to the dzongkhag administrations, local governments, schools, colleges and communities whose trust and collaboration made our work in 2025 possible.

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Digital Democracy Initiative

UNDP

unicef

Australian Aid

DW Akademie

GlobalGiving

Partners

Bhutan Canada Foundation

RENEW

Royal University of Bhutan

Save the Children

BTI
Bhutan Transparency Initiative

HAB

BMF
Bhutan Media Foundation

JAB
Journalists' Association of Bhutan

Ministry of Education and Skills Development

འབྲུག་བཙན་བཀྲུད་དང་དམངས་གཙོའི་ལྷེ་བ།

BHUTAN CENTRE
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

OUR VISION

A vibrant democracy where citizens are informed, engaged, and proactive

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