

Governance & Youth

“Nurturing productive and responsible youth with ability to act as an agent for change, irrespective of gender, in pursuit of sustainable development based on democratic values and ideals”

Background

Governance is the act of governing. “It relates to the decisions that define expectations, grant power or verify performance”. Bhutan being a small democratic country, ensuring good governance is essential of which the participation of youth (defined as 10-24 yrs old) remains paramount as youths constitute around a third of the total population (Adolescent Development and Participation, UNICEF).

Hence, providing opportunities to every youth from all walks of life, irrespective of gender, to participate fully and effectively in the progress of a nation is an essential ingredient of good governance. The inequality as it concerns gender has been especially problematic; The past successive local governments and parliament elections have seen low women participation. In 2018 only 19 candidates were women out of 188 candidates during the primary election.

At present educational institutions (college and high schools) are considered to be apolitical in nature, and treated with such sensitivity that students are deprived of discussion on political process and political matters. As a result they are not able to get important information about political parties, candidates, etc. and also on the democratic processes which all contribute to uninformed decision-making during the elections. Instead of restricting the space, young people need to be made aware of their role, the nation’s expectations from them and educate them on the policies and direction taken by the government. In addition, they should be encouraged to All of these will contribute towards strengthening youth participation and empowering them in nation-building which, as a result will allow youths to make informed decisions which has bearing on their lives.

As we looked into the background section of the National Youth Policy (NYP) 2011, we identified some of the issues that were in line with the discussions we had in our group. However, there were few issues which were not mentioned. Perhaps those issues were not as relevant back when the NYP was framed in 2011 but we believe have grown important over time.

Following are the four *critical issues* identified in our group:

1. Limited political platform for youths
2. Limited participation of women in politics and decision-making
3. Long-term goals compromised for short term gains with ad-hoc government decisions.
4. Youths are more aware of rights than responsibility.

1. Limited political platform for youths.

Even though youths studying in educational institutions are eligible voters, they are nonetheless deprived of political discussions and don't get the opportunity to participate in the political process. This is as a result of viewing educational institutions as apolitical and treated with a lot of sensitivity. Although the effort to make schools apolitical stem from well meaning intentions to preserve educational institutions as the seat of learning and not charged political grounds mercy at the fate of crafty orators, in reality the utter lack of any information directly from the source, makes the students turn towards social media or hearsay which are dangerous, unmoderated and unregulated platforms.

Moreover since they are not included in political matters, they tend to be ignorant about democratic decisions made in the nation that affect their lives. Therefore, there needs to be more platforms for youth to discuss political issues so that the possibilities of our country choosing wrong candidates based on misinformation is reduced. It is for this reason that we present our vision *'to enable youth to raise their voice for vibrant and open society with democratic values and ideals'*.

As it concerns the specific policy statements of the NYP 2011, we would suggest an amendment to the already existing policy statement 26, which states *'To promote an environment that encourages young people's participation in decision making'*.

'To promote open and conducive environment that encourages young people's participation in informed decision making process'

2. Limited women participation in political and decision making

Women participation in decision making is important for ensuring gender inclusivity. However, the past successive parliamentary elections and local government elections have seen very low women representation. The current parliament has only 11 women as compared to 61 men. The

situation is even worse in the local government with only 2 women gups of the total 203 gups. Additionally in a total of 1,044 Chiwogs, only 129 *Tshogpas* are women. Even in institutions and schools, girls are less represented in leadership roles.

Social stigma pertaining to women in politics and inferiority complex are seen as two most pertinent causes of low women participation and representation. Nonetheless, such low representation in decision making might still lead to the negligence of issues related to women as only women can understand women's issues deeply and comprehensively. Therefore, instituting temporary special measures would be one solution. One suggestion is to reserve a gender quota (at least 30 %) for women candidates by political parties. For instance, in Rwanda, their constitution in 2003 provided for 30 percent women parliament members, and today the percentage has increased to 61. In addition, there should be National Social Stigma campaigns across our country, so that society will be supportive of women's leadership.

3. Long term goals compromised for short term gains with ad hoc government decision

Since the inception of democracy in 2008, Bhutan has seen three different parties ruling the governments in three successive parliamentary elections. The three governments have had differing ideas and pledges, and therefore have sought to bring various development and policy changes in line with their pledges. The downside of this diversity in their plans and vision, coupled with public pressure to fulfill their pledges, has been ad-hoc decisions. As a result, it has created chaos and confusion in society. For instance, the removal of class ten cut off point and the government's decision to enroll every class ten pass out students either in private or public school has created a huge confusion among youths and parents as a whole. Though the government with good intention has adopted and implemented its plans, their decision has been relayed to the public on such short notice that it has contributed to students making regrettable decisions. For example, out of 11,810 students, 8000 students had registered for private school, which later changed due to the misinformation they received.

The consequences of ad hoc decisions extend beyond the immediate confusion and chaos that follows; In the long run it will undermine people's faith in the elected government. Therefore, it is important for every large scale government policy to undergo rigorous scrutiny (such as the GNH screening tools) before its implementation. Additionally, the public needs to be aware about the GNH screening tool so that the public can hold the government of the day accountable. If such checks and balances are fulfilled we can have transparent government adhering to established policy protocol for sustainable development growth.

4. Youths are more aware of rights than responsibility.

Today's generation are mostly aware about the benefits they get from the state but they often ignore the duties associated with the rights they are granted. For instance, the previous government with noble intention implemented the central school policy whereby students got all of their necessities for free. However soon after, students were found to be misusing those resources. In schools, plates and mugs that were given for free were seen in gardens and school uniforms were not cared for. Going beyond the central schools case, young people in colleges and other institutions are also seen misusing and destroying public properties with an utter lack of sense of ownership.

Therefore, we would like to recommend that it is important for democracy clubs in school to look beyond just teaching electoral procedure to also inculcate the importance of fundamental duties in the minds of young people. For countries with a good future, it is important to nurture a productive and responsible youth who are democratically conscious with balanced attitudes towards rights and responsibility.

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